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THE SINGING CARAVAN





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The Wisdom of the East Series

EDITED BY

L. CRANMER-BYNG

Dr. S. A. KAPADIA

THE SINGING CARAVAN

By the Same Writer

In this Series :

THE DIWAN OF ABUL-ALA

(Fourth Thousand)

ON THE FORGOTTEN ROAD

THE SHADE OF THE BALKANS

YRIVAND

IN PURSUIT OF DULCINEA

(WISDOM OF THE EAST)

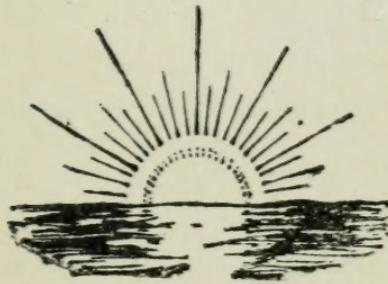
THE SINGING CARAVAN

SOME ECHOES OF ARABIAN POETRY

BY

HENRY BAERLEIN

"This is a thinge of *meere industrie*; a collection
without wit or invention, a very toy!"—BURTON.



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NOTE.—Seeing that the vignette which Dr. Dillon once designed for his notepaper and copyrighted, by the way, was so appropriate, he has been good enough to let me place it on the cover of this book. It represents the wind blowing at a piece of thistledown, while underneath, in Arabic, we read that all things pass away.

TO JOHN DALEBROOK OF SEVILLE

ONCE upon a time, at Guimarães in Portugal, I made a vow that I would share a book with you. The telegram you sent me thither stated that when I returned to Seville it would be to your abode, for you would share with me the final piece of bread. That evening in towered Guimarães had otherwise been melancholy, since the truth—a ghastly truth at any time of life—had forced itself upon me that I was unpicturesque. All day I had been seated, more or less, upon the outside of a bumping coach whose many other occupants were garbed, or so I fancied, for a performance of the Portuguese National Anthem, which has the sound of comic opera. Up above me was a most unbending patriot who played this Anthem on a concertina from the misty dawn into the night. Up above me also was an agricultural lady, far in years and of a merry disposition; now and then her feet would dance a little, and throughout the day they were unclad and were supported by my shoulders. But in Guimarães I found your message. . . . Books are the best provender—

"C'est la meilleure munition que j'aye trouvé," says Montaigne, "à cet humain voyage." And if this bread of mine has not the sunset flavour which attaches to the last production, have I not demonstrated that the picturesque is not for me? Now this part of the book, such as it is, is yours; perhaps it is the better part, for I am dealing with a friend. I think of you, John Dalebrook, and the palms are waving near the Guadalquivir and my heart is heavy.

Oh, the splendid nights when you and Dillon and myself would sit in rocking-chairs upon the roof and listen to the sleep of Seville! You the man of comfortable flesh, with imps of laughter lurking in the folds thereof; Dillon of the wistful countenance, a god of language, seeing that his words were as a flock of stars—not seldom, too, some falling star to gratify our frailties)—we spoke of great things and of small, for instance I related how that venerable man with whom I used to bathe had answered me. One day when he had rowed into the middle of the tawny, rushing river, and I was about to plunge, I put the query: "Don Cristóbal, if you were not here to take me back into the boat a hundred metres farther down, should I be carried off to Cadiz and the sea?" "*Que hombre!*" declared the boatman—we may call him that without exaggerating, for he dwelt in one boat underneath a sort of tent, while his avocation was to keep

that and four other boats from being stolen ; not a single one of them was his—“ *hombre !* ” declared the hoary boatman, “ there is no occasion for you to be mournful, Don Enrique ; I should think your body, long before it reaches San Fernando, would be thrown upon the mud, and those who are engaged in such affairs would give you very decent burial. . . . ” So Dillon, you and I discoursed of this and that, not resting longer anywhere than does the wind-swept moon of Andalucia. Presently from earth would come the watchman’s cry : “ *Ave Maria Santissima !* We stand at three o’clock. It is serene.”

That is as much of the dedication as I wrote yesterday, and since then I have had a terrifying dream. Innumerable men and women floated down a river, each of them astride a book ; the river was tempestuous and very dark. Before we came to the first of the bridges various books—not only little ones—had sunk, and the river was very dark. Upon the bridge a multitude of people stood, some of them so boorish that they did not look on us at all, and some regarded only certain sorts of travellers, and some who leaned across the parapet appeared to have an eye for each of us. I turned towards the comrade who happened to be next to me ; his brow was radiant in to-morrow’s sun. “ Tell me,” said I, “ whither do we go ? ” And he replied : “ To Cadiz and the everlasting sea ! ” Then we

DEDICATION

discovered on the mud a person looking at us, not unkindly, through a pair of tinted spectacles. "That is a critic," quoth my neighbour. "Listen now; he wants to ask you something." Strange, I mused, for such is his appearance that one scarcely would have thought oneself to have a secret to reveal to him. "Whither are you going?" exclaimed the critic, and whirling past I made reply, as bravely as I could: "To Cadiz and the sea." We swept along and what he shouted I could hear but faintly: "Depends on—your—boat." We jostled onward in a piteous confusion and I could not answer. Woe is me, I wish I could have shouted back: "*Ave Maria Santissima! It is serene.*"

H. B.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

THE object of the Editors of this series is a very definite one. They desire above all things that, in their humble way, these books shall be the ambassadors of good-will and understanding between East and West—the old world of Thought and the new of Action. In this endeavour, and in their own sphere, they are but followers of the highest example in the land. They are confident that a deeper knowledge of the great ideals and lofty philosophy of Oriental thought may help to a revival of that true spirit of Charity which neither despises nor fears the nations of another creed and colour. Finally, in thanking press and public for the very cordial reception given to the "Wisdom of the East" Series, they wish to state that no pains have been spared to secure the best specialists for the treatment of the various subjects at hand.

L. CRANMER-BYNG.
S. A. KAPADIA.

NORTHBROOK SOCIETY,
185 PICCADILLY, W.

THE SINGING CARAVAN

I

THE LIFE OF ARAB POETRY

NO man may look upon the dead and say, “They were, they are not.” If we come to those Bedawi tents among the stones that have been Babylon we cannot say that Babylon is dead. One stone may not be standing on another, but the words which are inscribed upon them are inscribed on living hearts. We shall not look across the years and say that one of them has been a people’s boundary. Forsooth we think in sorrow of a vanished people, and we do not think in sorrow of ourselves. But if their hand has carved some words upon a boulder in the wilderness and they are living words—the people live. So does the poetry of all the Arabs dwell to-day with the Bedawi. Ask of one from where he came. “From the longest lineage I come, from the deserts and the blameless deserts. I do not deny my fatherland, my father is unknown to me.” Be skilful in your reading of the poets and you have a place in the Bedawi’s heart; but if you read them badly you will

see, like Burckhardt, that the book is pulled out of your hand.

The desert, which in our eye is a wilderness of desolation, has for the Bedawi quite another aspect. We descry the traces of a path, we moralise and say that for a thousand years it has been overgrown by vegetation; the Bedawi says that but a thousand years ago his brother came along the road. Men are men, and most of them are buried. So the stranger's camping-ground among the Arabs is a graveyard, where he finds the most distinguished of his hosts. Always it was the desert which the Arab loved. "I have nothing on my conscience," says an emir who died in the year 1049, "except the death of five or six folk of the desert whom I slew; as for the town's people, God has no thought of them." An Arab's home is in the desert, where the white fire of the sun is falling. No matter if the present architects could never carve the ruined capital which ornaments a doorway; as the present owner gazes on it he considers that for him this architect was working. Even as a palm, he can preserve his dignity among the ruins; he is no more to be agitated than the yellow shrubs of oleander or the colonies of cactus. At the close of daylight, when he glides towards the fire of aromatic smoke, he watches how the desert, the unchanging desert, is the scene of night's procession, which is brown

and violet and graver blue and indigo. And while he chants the mournful, venerable airs, he watches that procession of the sky—red, orange, green—until the stars come out and seem to be so near and large that we and they must have a common destiny. For those who are the most unfortunate Abu'l-Ala has written :

You sing about the smallness of the stars—
The fault is in your eye, not in the stars.¹

And there is something now which has been thrown before an Arab's eye. No longer does he have the wish to pluck the violets of the setting sun, he does not dance at all to see the dance of white flower on the almond-trees, and when the shining summit of a mountain broods above the mist he does not think that there are mighty poets in Arabia. These are the words of Abu'l-Ala² :

Is it not in the winds our love reposes,
Which are ambassadors of all the roses ?
Is not the lord of rocks and trees their lover
And of the flowers that strive his land to cover ?
But man is earth's uncomfortable guest
Until she takes him on her lap, to rest.

¹ This thought is adapted from Mansur-at-Tamami, the jurisconsult who died in the year 918. "There be foolish folk," he said, "who deprecate the study of the law, but it will not suffer from their contempt. The midday sun will shine serenely and upon the blind."

² The great Syrian poet. Cf. *The Diwan of Abu'l-Ala* in this series.

"I leave you the finest part of my inheritance," said the great-uncle of Zohair, "I leave you my talent for poetry." "But that is mine already," said the famous pre-Islamic poet. "Nay," replied the old man, "all Arabia knows that poesy is an inheritance of my house, and that it went from me to you." Notwithstanding this, he gave to Zohair a more worldly legacy as well. And in the inheritance of the modern Arab there is much of this world, much of Islam. He is the descendant of the miserable men who sacked the library of Alexandria and flew zealously upon the ancient literature of Persia. Faithful to the creed, they strove, when collecting early poetry, not to collect anything which referred to pagan gods or customs. They had made up their minds that there existed only one God; so when other people settled that the gods were three hundred and sixty it was evident the people were depraved. And it was doing them a kindness if one substituted Allah's name in every passage where one found the names of Lat or Uzza. But even as the children of these fanatics did arise, to preserve the glories of antiquity, so would it now be possible for them to rise again, to shake aside the veil of Islam, and to watch the marvels of the sun, the wind, the rain. These were the three magicians who made the poets of Arabia, and the people, in their wisdom, said that poetry was lawful magic.

Now this veil of Islam is but lightly worn by the Bedawi. They put their faith in holy tombs and charms and sacred groves. They will not exalt religious functions into spheres of the police, as did occur in mediæval Baghdad : it was customary in the mosque, while the prayer was being said, for a policeman to be present, listening for an omission. When such a thing happened the culprit could be slain. Some, at all events, were in favour of that course, while others—for example Abu Hanifa, the great jurist who died in the year 767—were opposed to any punishment beyond a physical correction. . . . As for the Moslem with one God and the pagan with many, it would seem as if a chasm yawned between the places of their worship. The true believer has a God who does not want for names ; the pagan, on the other hand, has many gods who merely have one name apiece. If we select among the Moslems' ninety-nine "most comely names," we notice that their God is called the Independent One, the Very Strenuous One in devising Stratagems, the Frequent Repenter of His Wrath, the Owner of the Day of Retribution, the Praised One (which is no exaggeration), the Tent-peg, the Postponer—nobody will be surprised to see the Moslem stand in fear of such a God. The pagan has a multitude of gods, and looks at them with more familiarity. If he is Mau-

passant's good farmer he will wash their faces, though your laughter is immoderate. That was not always so—we learn from an Assyrian inscription, telling of the deeds of Hassar-Laddon in the desert : “The Arab King came to Nineveh, town of my domination, with numerous presents ; he kissed my feet. He prayed that I would give him back his gods ; I had pity upon him. I had the statues of the gods repaired ; I had inscribed on them the praise of Assour, my lord, accompanied with my signature, and I gave them back to him.” Now there are many who would praise the moderation which inspired the missionary efforts of Hassar-Laddon ; perhaps he thought that there was not much difference between the one God and the many.

We talked about a chasm which divides the temples of the Moslem and the pagan : in this temple is a pagan Arab worshipping the dog-star, Sirius ; in that other is a Moslem worshipping his God, and, after calling him by many names, he cries, “O Lord of the dog-star.” Here is the Moslem saying that the dog-star should be worshipped—so bright a jewel is it in the girdle of the Lord—and here is the pagan saying that the dog-star should be worshipped. This Moslem preference for one God would not matter very much if it did not make him dull to poetry, and in that respect it is deplorable. As for the Bedawi,

faithful to the sun and moon which are the gods, says Aristophanes, of the barbarian—so long as a Bedawi lives we cannot say that Arab poetry is dead. Myrrh and citronelle are drooping on the desert, powerless to give a perfume to the winds ; perhaps a rain will make them free. But centuries have passed across Arabia while poetry has hardly raised a voice against the silence. Yet we have not come to bury poets, but to praise one ; and, however much we are inclined, as we read Mutannabi's song, to think about Abu'l-Ala :

When you came into the town you lit up the darkness with daylight,
Since you have left us forsaken the darkness imprisons the day ;
When that our home was your home, aloft rose the glory of Manbedsh—
So that in heaven it stood vastly more high than the Calves. . . .

we shall not speak about the death of Arabic poetry. Abu'l-Ala is not the last, but the most recent poet to win greatness in Arabia ; and if we are to understand him we must have some knowledge of his predecessors and contemporaries, we must regard the men who were devoted to religion and philosophy, nor must we be in ignorance of politics. Suppose Abu'l-Ala had written nothing but the purest poetry, descrip-

tions of a lizard or a night of stars, it is conceivable that such a poem would be perfect. Those who love it may not want to know its father or its age. But the poems of Abu'l-Ala have much to do with morals and religion, diet, women and philosophy. The reader will desire to know what were the prevalent opinions, so that he may see how far the poet was unorthodox. There is a passage where we are informed :

Know that the water will be sour as sin
If it has been the bedroom of a jinn.

And we must try to learn how far the poet was expressing his own opinion, how far he was repeating a superstition. If we happen to remember what occurred at Mecca by the Zemzem well, where one could see the faithful being soused with buckets of the water, full of a belief that Allah multiplied it in the night (whereas it used to sink), then we shall consider if Abu'l-Ala was not sarcastic. A poem whose appeal is ethical must not be sent before another judge, and when we read Abu'l-Ala on women it is requisite that we should know what place they filled or could fill in Arabia. . . . With regard to politics, the sword of Islam had so great an influence upon the pen that it would be impossible to speak of Arab letters if we did not bear in mind the fortunes of the Arab empire. Underneath that empire was a book, while underneath

all other books, for better or for worse, lay the empire. “The royal palace of Ingilterrah is called Parlamentu,” so the Persians wrote a hundred years ago when they compiled a history for the British Minister; and we may write with greater truth that “the libraries of Arabia are called the Koran. . . .” One must give some attention, naturally, to the States with which Arabia came into contact, such as Egypt, Persia and Byzantium.

So we shall begin with pre-Islamic poetry; we shall proceed with Islam rising in its strength and the enfeebled poets of the period; we shall continue with a weaker, less pietistic time of Islam and a flourishing of poetry first in Arabia and then in Spain; we shall proceed with Islam in a sullen mood, driven back and trying to display its power by the destruction of such things as poetry, because they hang like pictures on the wall and mitigate the grand austerity.

II

THE PRE-ISLAMIC PERIOD

IT is not necessary for us to believe that Adam was the first of Arab poets. There is handed down a certain distich¹ as being his, but we are unable blindly to accept the word of those who handed down, the rawi. They were enthusiasts, often they were themselves poets, and confusion could not help arising, for the rawi would introduce his own words, and then again he would insert into his own poem, unconsciously or by way of compliment, the verses which had been confided to him. Any piece would rise in vulgar value if an ancient bard was made the author of it. Hammad, a rawi of the eighth century, was invited to explain why one of Zohair's poems opened so abruptly. His reply was that the poem started with three other lines, and these he gave. They have always been retained, as they are beautiful and most appropriate, and they have not suffered from the fact that

¹ Beginning : “ We are the sons of earth. . . . ” And when, in his *Risalatu'l Ghufra*, Abu'l-Ala is on the way to Paradise he meets with Adam and at once begins to criticise the verse, while Adam strenuously argues that he did not write it.

Hammad, later on, confessed they were his own. We sympathise with Hammad. Doubtlessly he practised all the common virtues and the vices of the rawi. What in a poem was obscure he would elucidate, he would explain allusions, he would illustrate the poem with a mass of detail from the author's life. Without the rawi we should not have had the poems.¹ If he sometimes yielded to his own poetic temperament, adding or omitting as he thought was good, the critics of the day were quite ingenious in showing that the mention of more than one mistress in a set of verses caused them to scent interpolations ; also they discovered signs of editing by differences of the dialect, by lack of idiom, and so forth. Anyhow, the virtues of the rawi put their vices in the background, but the special sympathy we feel for Hammad is aroused by his attack on sham. His weapon was a sham, but no matter. It was good enough to prick the folly of all those who like a work of art in proportion to its age. May the gods preserve us from that kind of critic. We do not expect him to know what is beautiful, and clearly we must not expect him to know what is old. He loved the beauties of Macpherson's poem when he thought it ancient ;

¹ " Longer than many another people," says Flügel in his *History of the Arabs* (Leipzig, 1832, p. 71), " and in spite of all their traffic with the lands of culture, did Arabians neglect the art of writing."

now he says it is not beautiful. And for the sake of him a rawi said that Adam wrote the distich.

Let us go back no further than the golden age, the Age of Ignorance. A fire is on the desert. Hospitable, avaricious, warlike and exclusive, a Semitic people which for centuries had been in some connection with the peoples who were then most civilised, we may perceive them in the Age of Ignorance possessing arts that others had, but with a special passion for the art of verse. It is unjust that we should criticise a people by the standard of an alien race. "Behold," we seem to say, "the glorious Germanic race, which is our own ! Let the Semitic people show how far they have Germanic qualities. In poetry they have indeed the Psalms and Hebrew poetry in general, but are they tender and profound ? Do they complain as we do of the works of God ? In morals they are strict and sometimes lofty, but are they profound and tender ? In politics they have no middle way, but always anarchy or despotism. Perhaps a wise despotism is the best of governments. However, we—we know what is liberty. Maybe our knowledge has from time to time been academic, maybe in mediæval Florence or in ancient Athens or in revolutionary France or in religious Spain it has not always been expedient to draw the line between licentiousness and freedom.

But we have understood, as well as Bishop Butler, that the liberty of a community implies obedience, subjection, authority, subordination. Is it not very much to have recognised as much as that? What have the Semites done?—they have given us religion. That of the Germanic people used to be so full of poetry, so vague. That of the Jews arrived and laid it down that God created earth and heaven—a very simple, formal and fanatic faith. But when apparently becoming universal, then it was reformed by Jesus and it has resumed the poetry. More and more is the religion of Germanic peoples being purged of the Semitic hardness and assurance.

DANCING.—Thus it would seem as if Semitic peoples could not be compared, except unfavourably, with the Germanic. But in the greatest and the oldest arts of music, verse and dance it will be seen that Greece herself cannot look down upon Arabia. So much devotion did the Arabs pay to verse that one is apt to think they were indifferent to dance and music. “All three,” says Aristotle, “have a common basis, being imitative of the characters of men, their actions and their passions.” A Pindaric ode was sung, accompanied by music and the dance. For long these arts were deemed inseparable, and the man who practised one was obliged to practise all. Thus nobody before

Eleuther sang at Delphi in the contest if the words were not his own. And elsewhere they prevented Hesiod from taking part, for he did not accompany himself upon the lyre. Now with the Arabs there was no such unity, but in the spheres of dance and music they were not barbarians. Unfortunately nowadays their dancing has become a rite, and one in which the clothes are treated not at all as in another dance of Semitic origin. At Seville, where the stately movements of the Seises are an imitation of the dancing of the Israelites before the Ark, enormous care is given to prevent the clothes from being injured. But al-Ghazzali shows us what in better days prevailed among the Arabs : “ As for the tearing up of garments, there is no indulgence for it except when the matter passes beyond the control of volition.” It is therefore not surprising that to-day they blush to dance in public and consider it an exercise for which there must be payment. That it was tended once with a solicitude we can applaud is to be gathered from a second observation of al-Ghazzali. “ It belongs,” says he, “ to good breeding that no one should arise to dance with people if his dancing is considered sluggish and inert.”

MUSIC.—With regard to music we have got the word of Ibn Chaldun, saying that the pre-Islamic Arabs were acquainted with no music save the cries for urging on their camels, and

we know that singers were addressed as camel-drivers. But when Persia fell there came into the hands of the victorious Arab all the science of Persian music. Though Mahomet counselled that the faithful should have none of it, they settled subsequently that his prohibition was not laid on any music except such as was infected with unseemliness. In China, by the way, there have been edicts for the punishment of airs that sound effeminate. So, then, the Persian science flourished in Arabia, till it became a part of what an Arab savant had to learn. Deep were the speculations: a doctor known as Ibnol Heisem, who died in the year 1038, wrote on the effect of melodies upon the souls of animals. There was an effort to replace the Persian system by the Greek. A man of erudition, al-Farabi, the philosopher who died in the year 950, composed his book wherein the definition of rhythm is quite in the Greek spirit, and he divides music, after the Greek fashion, into theoretic and practical. The Arabs called him a musical wonder and a magician, but they did not follow him. As for the Persian influence, about the year 1300 many writers lived who were especially devoted to the mathematical and philosophic side of music. On the other side, the practical, we get the system of the seven whole and the five half-tones, which is now established in Europe, and forms the foundation of our own

science of music. We have no proof that this was taken into Persia by European missionaries or ambassadors, who would not usually occupy themselves with such things. Nor could the learned Orientals have been anxious to accept the teaching; but while they were occupied with theories, inconceivably profound, the players, who did not possess the will or the capacity to be learned, went on playing and by chance they found the proper system. We may see in mediæval Europe much the same condition of affairs between the doctors of music and the musicians; when these latter had already got the minor and major scale, the learned men, says Glareanus, were disputing as to whether eight or twelve or fifteen was the number of the keys. Thus Arab music was of Persian origin, but the developments reveal the working of the Arab mind. There was a tree, they held, which had four roots, the roots of music, in precise relation to the elements. One was the root of water, and the music of that root was cold and damp; one was the root of fire, and the music of it warm and dry. We need not go on climbing through this wonderful Arabian tree whereon the tones of music are not only boughs and branches but are in relation to the twelve celestial signs, the planets and the seven nights and days. We would not, like the Chinaman who wrote about the dynasty of T'ang, suppose we had

described the Arabs if we wrote they have black beards and large noses, that they drink no wine and have no music. On the contrary, they have a great deal of music, and if we close our eyes to what appears fantastic and observe what is harmonious to our own convictions we shall think more favourably of it. Hajji Thalfa teaches that the soul, by melodies enchanted, longs to contemplate a loftier being, have a message from a purer world, and that the spirit darkened by the body is prepared to mingle with the forms of light which are about the throne of God. And it is a fact that the crusaders carried home to Christian Europe what has since remained the battle-music. This apparently was cultivated, first of all, not with a view to giving armies some encouragement, but for the discouraging effect upon the foe. "They shall raise up a cry of destruction," says Isaiah, "in the way of Horonaim." And as the northern tribes went into battle they were accompanied by blasts of the wild horns and by the sound of awe-inspiring harps. We have more sympathy with those who sang less indirectly for their own side, declaiming an old poem while the ranks arranged themselves for battle, the mill of battle, as they called it. The crusaders did not only bring war-music from Arabia, but instruments of music also. And, as another proof that Arabs were addicted to this art,

we have to look no further than the singers and musicians who were gathered at the court of Frederick II. of Hohenstaufen; they were the most esteemed of artists, and in them the Arab element predominated.

VERSE.—Dancing, music—now we come to verse. When a tribe discovered that a poet had been born to them it would be but a little time before the news had gone abroad, so that the neighbours came to wish them joy. Mutton and the milk of ewes would be prepared, grasshoppers and also locusts that are caught in early morning when their wings are damp with dew. And those who feast whole-heartedly in honour of the poet will not think of what the Arabs say concerning one who finds no fault: “ You are like a grasshopper; in your mouth nothing is distasteful.” Then would the house of cloth resound with music and congratulation, for the poet was a weapon against man and time. With songs of scorn¹ he would abash the foe, while

¹ The rhymed prose of the mocking songs, or *higa*, was among the Arabs the earliest form of poetical speech. Prose of this kind (*cf.* Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*) was considered magical, and was employed not only in combat but in exorcisms, in protesting prayers and by mendicants who thought that it would have the power to open purses. With regard to songs of scorn, the makers of them had enormous reputations which, under Islam, it became an object of the caliphs to destroy. They wished to have the songs regarded as a heathen relic, and as criminal. Thus when Archilochus, unable to become Lycambes' son-in-law,

he would chronicle in verse the splendour and the deeds that otherwise would be forgot. "A pedigree," says Abu'l-Ala, "will not keep a man alive," but even as in death an Arab will not sleep among the members of another family, so did they cherish more than other things the stock from which themselves were sprung. It may or it may not be meritorious to think your tribe can do no wrong—such was their attitude. So when a woman married into foreign parts her father or her brother would address her: "Bear not easily," they said, "and have no boys; for thus wilt thou bring near the distant places and wilt raise up enemies." The record of each family was kept in verse.¹ And sometimes all the members of a family had the poetic prowess. Ibn Khallikan relates about the Abu Hafsa that "These persons have the power of touching with their tongue the point of their nose, and this indicates a talent for speaking with elegance and precision." Says Ibn Khallikan, "God knows how far that may be true!" But he is quoting from al-Mubarrad, a deeply

wrote against him a satire which was said to have persuaded him to suicide, the Lacedæmonians commanded that this writer's books should be carried from their city.

¹ So, too, among the Hebrews, whose poetry in choice of words and in construction differed largely from the common language. "All that deserved to be generally known and accurately remembered," says Bishop Lowth (*Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, delivered at Oxford in 1741), "was clothed in poetry."

30 CONSIDERATION FOR THEIR POETS

learned man. The Abu Hafsa were, no doubt, exceptional; but if a poet rose in solitude among his tribe there was a custom which enabled him to spread his work, and cultivate the work of others. From of old the so-called months of peace were sacred, and without them poetry would not have come to such a pitch before Mahomet: laws of quantity and rhyme had been established; the cassidas had a certain sequence of ideas, so that one might not sing the praise of the beloved or a patron if one had not portrayed the blackened hearthstones and the lonely dwellings and the brushwood and the raven at the spot where the beloved once had been. We may compare the sacred months with what was called the Treuga Dei, founded when in the year 1032 a revelation visited the Bishop of Aquitaine. It was a time of unaccountable calamity, and so great was the superstitious dread that neighbours settled to be peaceable for seven years, and that in future nobody should go in fear of molestation from the evening of Thursday until Monday morning. As for the Arabian peace-months, nobody was ever during them to be made an object of attack, and the Prophet, while he specially retained the peace-time of the pilgrimage to Mecca, gave permission that one could attack the foes of Islam always. When the people were assembled in the month of pilgrimage they brought new words and

lovely words from all the districts of Arabia, so that the poet's instrument became a splendid one to wield. It was comparatively splendid, for we see too often that a flying thought, when we have given it the garb of words, will droop and fly no more. We may be tempted to suggest that in Arabia the language made the poetry : when some impressionable Arab saw the caravans emerging from the desert and depositing before his tent a wealth of words he thereupon sat down and wove them into poetry. But even as our ship does not come sailing into port for the reason that we hope it will, so did no desert ship arrive but as the fruit of toil. Arabs in the sixth century had an imagination, they were passionate, they were men of enterprise and they were free, their character was strongly marked, their morale was as pure and open as the sky—that is, they had what is required for poetry. They would have wrought it even if their instrument, the language, had not been improved. The Chinese language is most rudimentary, it is without inflection and the order of the words may not be changed, yet the people are so gifted that—not to speak of other exploits—they have made themselves the literary people of the world. Of course it would have been much better if they had attempted to improve their instrument, as did the Arabs. But in able hands an awkward instrument will be of

greater use than if in awkward hands is placed one that is delicate.

It is indeed worth while for us to pay attention to the pre-Islamic verse. "Zohair has said about you many things of beauty," quoth the caliph Omar to a person who had sworn to give not only what the poet wanted but for every poem in his honour likewise a female slave or else a horse. "And we," replied the person, "we have given him as many things of beauty." "What you gave him," said the caliph, "that will perish, but his praises will endure for ever. . . ." And we know what kind of people were these Arabs, if we make a study of the verse. Bad qualities and good, in our opinion, would be necessary for the founding of an empire which imposes one command on many people. Say that we believe, like Ibn Chaldun, that an empire goes through certain phases and will usually finish in three generations, it would still be valuable to regard the qualities of those who founded it—not the special circumstances that were favourable to the Macedonians, the Assyrians, the Arabs, but the underlying qualities they had in common. Ibn Chaldun's mind was turned towards the nomads, their establishment in towns, their yielding to the life of luxury; but even if an empire cannot last beyond three generations it would still be curious to note the mingled motives which impel a people to give orders in the house-

hold of another people. Yet we must now confine ourselves to studying the Arab, and in those four stages into which we set his culture, so that we may mark the place of Arabs in the story of the world ; we shall be able to devote ourselves more to the changes of the moment if we can establish, first of all, a clear conception of the things which are unchanging.

Conservatism,¹ be it vice or virtue, is the most remarkable phenomenon of Arab literature. We picture Islam as a prison-house, exhibiting a catalogue of antique regulations, and refusing to regard the difference of intellect between one inmate and another. "Out beyond my wall," it says, "you shall not go"; and certainly there is some evil stalking on the other side. "Separated by the wall," it says, "are good and evil; this my wall is the production of the highest wisdom. . ." But before the days of Islam there existed an Arabian wall, the product of the wisest, so they said. A ringlet might be called a scorpion, while it was permitted to compare a handsome face with the full moon or the day. Certain objects might

¹ To show that Arabs have preserved this quality we may repeat their proverb, "ugly as a chameleon" (Landberg, *Proverbes et Dictions du Peuple Arabe*). A man of Beyrouth took a wife on the description of a wet-nurse who arranged the marriage. But on the following day the man made his description : "I find she has the head of a chameleon"; and he repudiated her.

be mentioned by the poet, such as an antelope or an ass, the father of stupidity, or an aged ass, the grandfather of stupidity ; the panther was apparently not thought poetical. It cannot in these circumstances be surprising that the famous warrior and poet of the Ignorance, Antara, should begin his great cassida with the lamentation, very possibly authentic, that there is no more to say. Restriction, as was found by Wordsworth in the sonnet, is a blessing ; but the bird who pours a splendid sorrow from the cage is in the dungeon silent unto death. We can have too much of ancestral law, just as of ancestors. "Your father was an Arab, but your mother," so they taunted Antar, "was an Abyssinian slave, a negress." He replied : "One half of me is of the purest blood, the other is my sword ; so when you are in trouble it is me you call upon, and not on those who spend the time in calculating all their ancestry. . . ." Conservatism, a meticulous attention to detail, a palpable facility of technique, a Pegasus, in fact, who seems more of the circus than of Arab plains—these, if one may vary the metaphor, these are the builders who were ordered to construct between them almost every monument of Arab literature. You might very well suppose that censuring an Arab for conservatism is no more than a declaration that we are Occidentals. But listen to Abu'l-Ala :

They walk upon the road their fathers trod,
And amiably receive their fathers' God.
What if they linger at Mahomet's tent ?
They care not much for whom their knees are bent.
In wakefulness and sleep their sole desire
To keep the settled plan of things entire.

Of the great pre-Islamic poets¹ Imr el Kais was the most picturesque. His work was that of a consummate artist, and Mahomet said that his was the prerogative of leading all the poets to the place of woe.² But Imr el Kais does not concern himself about the future and about the past ; his one lament is for the disappearance of his youth, and the resulting loss of favour in the eyes of women. The poem of Tarafa is appreciated very highly by his countrymen ; about a third of it is occupied by the description of a camel, and it is remembered, to the glory of this writer, that alone of all the seven he compared a camel with a ship, and as the dancing girl, he said, floats at the banquet of her lord, so does the camel float upon his path in pride. The poets were supposed to have experienced what they sang, and all

¹ To give translations of the well-known pre-Islamic odes—the *Mu'allaqít*—does not enter into the scheme of this volume.

² But that early theologian, who desired to show that women were addressed to hell and for a proof collected sayings of the Prophet, had forgotten that Mahomet peopled Paradise with houris.

these pictures were insinuated so that one might construct, with their assistance, a more vivid painting of the poet's character. Zohair was old when he wrote his cassida. "I am blind," he says, "and I have eighty years of grief and glory." Being wise and virtuous, he was revered. Lebid, another of the seven, was less fortunate in his old age. Owing to the influence of the Koran, not so much the doctrine of it as the literary beauties of the second chapter, he professed himself a Moslem, and thereafter fell to writing very badly.¹ The cassida of Antara is a mingling of the tender and the fierce. But he is more remarkable as having gathered round him what is known as the Romance of Antara. This pretends to give his life and exploits, but is in fact a store of national traditions. Some people, pointing to the scalds who came with Rollo's army into France, have claimed for it a Gothic origin, while others take it as the handiwork of Saracens who settled in Spain at the beginning of the eighth century. This chivalric romance preserves its popularity ; those who now recite it in the streets of Cairo are called Anatireh. They chant the poetry and read the prose. Whatever view be held

¹ One may contrast Lebid with Cædmon, the father of English song, who likewise flourished in the seventh century. Before he was converted from Paganism he was a simple herdsman ; later, in the Abbey of St. Hilda, he sang for holy ends, and, what is more, he sang very well.

as to its origin, Gothic, Saracen, or Indian, it was apparently composed from traditional tales at the court of Haroun al Rashid. Just as men were apt to put all works of heroism to the credit of Antara, so do unlettered Arabs of to-day ascribe to him all poetry.¹

Arab writers of the golden age were not devoted solely to cassidas, but also to rhythmical prose and impromptu verse. We have specimens of this kind of prose in sundry proverbs on the weather :

March is the blusterer. Earthquakes and rains are in wait,
The seven huge snow-storms will come and others which are
not so great.

As for the impromptu verse, it would appear from all the numberless examples that herein the Arabs' courage was unequalled save by their success. "We are all gods!" cried Julian the Apostate; "we have but to dare!" One may quote the verses of Mahomet ben Omer el Enbari, who died in the year 977, and would have died before if Ibn Abbad, the vizier, had not urged a wrathful governor to pardon him. In return he was requested by the vizier to

¹ So spake a comrade of Miss Lowthian Bell, as they were sitting in the desert underneath the stars. Probably you know the passage in that most enchanting book *The Desert and the Sown*.

make a poem on the candles that were burning before him. And he said :

The flames upon the candle
Like fiery lances wave.
They are the fingers of the foe,
And your forgiveness crave.

Those who do not like this unpremeditated art will say that even if the verse be meritorious it has merely been preserved with a view to showing what an agile person was the poet. However, there is one case, if no more, in which a man's impromptu was extremely useful. Meskin ed Darimi, the poet, is said to have withdrawn into a mosque where he wanted to forget the world. A merchant came into the town with a shipment of black veils, but, as he could not sell them, he approached the poet and entreated his assistance. "What can I do ?" said the recluse, "for I have long since given up the art of poetry." The merchant did not cease from begging, and finally the poet left the mosque, put on his abandoned dress and said :

Fair veiled in black ! Oh, make the purpose plain
That with our pious friend you entertain,
Who barely was departed for the mosque
Than you were sitting at the door again.

As soon as it was known that the poet had returned to his former life not a woman or a

girl could live without one of the black veils, which were sold by the merchant at an incredible price. The poet went back into the mosque, to meditate.

Several times in the foregoing pages one has had occasion to refer to the cassida, so that a moderate familiarity may be presumed with what was the original Arabian form of verse. It was a poem with a purpose, but in early lyric days the purpose was not other than to sing the praise of mistress or of benefactor. Afterwards it grew to be didactic ; yet of these it is sufficient if we note the work of Ibn Habib, a grammarian who flourished in the tenth century and manufactured us a cassida for the sake of inculcating syntax. When it was employed for purposes of panegyric both the names of patron and of poet were habitually introduced, the former near to the beginning and the poet's near the close of the cassida. But this way of signature was not restricted to that form of verse ; it was quite usual in other forms which had more than two couplets and were derived from the Arabian rhyme system.¹ Of all of

¹ Cf. the Anglo-Saxon poet Cynewulf, who weaves into the lines of his verse the Runes which spell his name. And in the Bihari folk-songs, collected by Mr. Grierson when he was magistrate of Patna, it is customary for a poet to insert his own name and that of his patron in the last line. There is one example given where we have the poet courteously attributing his inspiration to the King, saying that "King Ram Chandra sang this song of the twelve months to Sur."

these the ghazel is the favourite of Oriental poets, and the ghazel resembles the cassida. But the true subject of the ghazel is love, and commonly it is more brief than the cassida. With regard to laws of metre, they were settled very thoroughly and very soon; each kind of the seventeen metres is adapted to a certain sentiment. The rhyme of the whole poem is determined by that of the opening line; and a translator into English has to recognise his limitations when a single rhyme, as occasionally happens, is repeated ninety times. This monorhyme is characteristic of the Arabian system, and usually decorates the second line of all the couplets, while the first remains unrhymed. A perverted feature of Arabian couplets—but no! when something of another people seems to us to be perverse are we seated always on the throne of reason? May we pretend that Arabs had a false idea of beauty on the ground that Olaiya, the caliph's daughter, wore a fillet of rare stones about her forehead to conceal its height? And when Jamil, the poet, sings of Olaiya, “I then took her by the ringlets and kissed her lips with the pleasure that a man, whose throat is parched with intoxication, finds in the cool water of a spring,” are we to say that Arabs had a false idea of decency because al-Yafi in his annals has omitted the latter of these verses, saying that it is not decent? Are

we so sure that Arabs cannot occupy the throne of reason, because they hold that love is in the liver and reason in the heart? Couplets of Arabian verse, with few exceptions, must give utterance to certain subjects and ideas in a strictly regulated order, and the individual couplets rarely carry on the argument. In their two lines they are complete, and sometimes it would seem to us as if an argument is hardly carried on from the first line of a couplet to the second. Thus we have a feeling that Abu'l-Ala does not avoid inconsequence, for this quotation is a couplet and not a pair of single lines. "It is no sin," he says—

It is no sin—a poem for your love.

I say the pilgrims do not cut their nails.

Verily he does not, as we nowadays are pleased to call it, labour the connection between his thoughts. . . . In the building of a Moorish dome, a thing of air, one is free to play with the supports, to render them fantastic. So was the building of an Arab poem. In a Gothic structure is the vault, a vast and vastly soaring mass, which must control the form of its supports. One has in Gothic a continued progress of the structure, and dependent on it was the progress of decoration. Moorish detail was developing, what time the structure was content to stay such as the bygone folk had regulated. So was it with

the fortunes of the Arab State, as with their poems and their domes. Mahomet had conceived an empire of the spirit, and although it passed when he was dead through mundane greatness and decline, yet the mortar of that building was the spirit. Round the dome of Arab empire, welding it for good or evil, was a mortar which consisted of the Koran, the Traditions and the general practice of the ancient imams. It was not susceptible to change. "No life is spoiled but one whose growth is arrested," quoth Lord Henry Wotton, whom epigrams could not prevent from being wise. How can Islam be compatible with progress, seeing that it crystallises into one unchanging whole the criminal, the civil and the canon law? But even as with domes and poems, so did the fantastic blight assail that mortar, and, apart from the diseases which invaded the material stones, it was quite evident the mortar was decaying when the people took to long discussions as to whether or not Abdallah, father of the posthumous Mahomet, was in hell.

Of the subjects proper to cassidas there is one whose import cannot be exaggerated. In the modern world opinions may diverge on the matter of equality between the sexes: there are men who deprecate it, being apprehensive that they will become less chivalrous; there are women who demand it in the name of

justice, and would be indignant if you gave them nothing more. But on this point an Oriental does not argue.

It is said by Meredith that if the Comic Muse is kept away there will be no civilisation, and if you want the Comic Muse you must have between the sexes some degree of social equality. There has been fun, he says, in Baghdad. But before Mahomet came there was a possibility of something more than fun. I will not say that all the freedom which the women had was of great advantage to the race ; often they could choose their own husbands and could obtain divorce, but on receiving a certain sum they could marry for a certain time—a year, a month, two days, one day or for the duration of a market or a fair. The women who participated in these temporary marriages were for the most part widows, and it must not be supposed that in the time before Mahomet every sort of union was allowed. A stepmother was not prohibited from marrying her stepson, though the general opinion did not think it nice, but a mother and a daughter were forbidden to accept in marriage the same man at the same time. It is in the cassida where lies the surest evidence that pre-Islamic women had a status. We are obliged to make a study of these old Arabian poems so that we may be familiar with the people's life and thought and feeling just before the rise of Islam. They

were barbarous in many ways, but also cultivated the spiritual, and—to confine ourselves to woman—in the greatest poems of that epoch woman has a very honourable mention. Love has not been turned to a religion, neither has the power of woman been excessively increased by fore-stalling St. Jerome and making love a sin. But a man regards his mistress with a sane enthusiasm; thus in some degree prevails between them that much-desired equality.

Was there much of this, you will demand, in Greece and Rome, where one is accustomed to expect a more than pre-Islamic civilisation? Any Roman was allowed¹ to put his wife to death if she tasted wine or stole the cellar key; but she had a good position in the household—aye, so good that even half a step upon the path of drunkenness was held to tarnish it. Before the dulled, imperial days of luxury there was fine moral and domestic life. Apart from the bearing which it has on civilisation, any woman would prefer the possibility of punishment from a Roman husband to the terrible indifference which Monsieur Bergeret adopted towards his peccant wife. The Grecian woman was not looked upon as equal to the man, but Hesiod did not indicate her true position when he talked about “a horse, a wife and a ploughing-ox.” An Aspasia, a Sappho or a Helen were not

¹ Cf. Pliny, *Hist. N.*, xiv. 14.

prevented from becoming famous, and upon this point the people may be said to have been civilised more than the sages. Perhaps it was misguided of them, but it proves that women were accounted somewhat when the populace was angry with Praxiteles for making a statue of Venus unadorned. And also it is unlikely that they fell into the error of Diogenes, who embraced nothing but cold statues. The situation of their women was, in fine, sufficiently exalted to permit of comedy, but it is curious to notice that a comedy was not a spectacle considered suitable for women. The Greeks thought that it was not well to hide any facet of themselves. What was all too mortal they took as unavoidable, and they preferred not to revile it but to bestow on it a sort of secondary rank in the social scale.¹ Women were excluded, and Aristophanes does not, in his numerous addresses to the public, make any to the ladies, as undoubtedly he would have done. It may be thought improbable that their exclusion was necessitated through the play's defective modesty, for they were free to witness the religious festivals. Whatever be the cause of that, a Grecian woman did enjoy some of the liberty which is so needful to the race. In Sparta they were told to do no more than to perpetuate the race, and where is Spartan comedy?

¹ Cf. Nietzsche, *Geburt der Tragödie* 3, 116.

Returning from this little voyage to the study of the pre-Islamic poems, we remark that none of them were written down until a hundred years from when Mahomet fled. The tribes were scattered, the rawi gone, the speech of Pagan times had now become affected by the speech of the conquered, and much of the poetry was lost. Ah, what if Islam did achieve the glory of a great religion—to exchange one set of idols for another ? If an Arab shop is plundered—or, as one says, cleaned out—the spectators laugh and they remind the shopman that cleanliness is part of the faith.

So much for the poetry of pre-Islamic Arabs. But as all things are relative it will behove us to compare this poetry and one with which we are supposed to be more familiar, that of the Old Testament. The Jews, the Syrians and the Arabs, three Semitic races, have a similarity of intellect. Not given very much to abstract thought, they have no veritable system of philosophy, nor yet the noblest forms of epic or dramatic poetry. The Hebrew genius was richer far than the Arabian, just as the landscape was poor and the country of the Jews was much more varied. That the Jews would commonly not sing of Nature pure and simple is of slight importance ; if as such it failed to win their interest they saw in it a passing symbol of the works of God. “ Ye who turn judgments to

wormwood, and leave off righteousness in the earth ; seek Him that maketh the seven stars and Orion, and turneth the shadow of Death into the morning, and maketh the day dark unto night ; that calleth for the waters of the sea, and poureth them out upon the earth. The Lord of hosts is His name. . . ." So, till the time of Job, was Nature treated as a shadow—the shadow of Jehovah. It is written in the Book of Job : " Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder ? " But the Jewish mind is undergoing a transition ; it begins to have a wider sense of Nature, to celebrate it with no after-thought, and the poem is continued thus : " He saith among the trumpets, Ha ! ha ! and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting." So the writer of this book has fled from the divine—that is to say, from what your theologians call divine—and suddenly the Bible is not older than the *Bible in Spain* : " Truly he stood on his head and these eyes saw him ; he stood on his head in the saddle as he passed the Frank rider, and he cried ' Ha ! ha ! ' as he passed the Frank rider ; and the Moslem horse cried ' Ha ! ha ! ' as he passed the Frank breed, and the Frank lost by a far distance." One may say that these two passages are of an equal age, since Nature was regarded in the former passage not as had been customary but in such a way as would not have appeared

anachronistic to a person living at the time of Borrow's imitation.

And when Abu'l-Ala set out to paint a steed¹ he did not fare so badly : " How greedily he seizes on the course ! Round his feet are bands of silver." But the way in which the Jews regarded Nature was sublime, and from their later poetry the clouds of glory did not disappear.

One may notice that between the poetry of Jews and Arabs other differences had their cause in the different customs of the people. Whereas an Arab sings of blood-revenge the Jew does not, for on this point had Moses legislated. And the familiar customs, being glorified in Hebrew poems, were allied to grandeur : " Behold," says Isaiah, " I have made thee a threshing wain." And almost every point of conduct, with Arabs as with Jews, was connected either indirectly or directly with their religion. And the religion which Mahomet gave the Arabs may undoubtedly be said to owe far more to Judaism than to Christianity or Paganism. It is the religion of the Jews adapted to Arabia, and, although Mahomet disapproved of the dogmatic teaching and the rigour of the Jewish ethic, one discovers up and down the Koran reminiscences, allusions and the very terms of Judaism, of its lore and

¹ In another place he says, " One that rivals the North Wind with his proud lineage."

ceremony. It so happened when Mahomet came that Arabian Christianity was in a low condition, and the Prophet's knowledge of it was derived from Greek or Abyssinian slaves. With the Jewish people it was different ; they read and wrote and were upon the pinnacle of culture.

We may not overlook the powers of magic which were said to be inherent in the Jews and which exalted them in popular esteem. Jesus was regarded in the Talmud, and generally by the ancient world, as a magician. So Juvenal (vi. 542-7) has made it clear that with regard to Hebrews this was the Græco-Roman judgment. Now that reputation must have been of great assistance to them in Arabia, and even if they were too wise in such a climate to pretend to have those rain-producing powers which in more western countries they professed. A manuscript entitled *The Sword of Moses*, dating from the first four centuries of the Christian era, has been discovered and decyphered by Dr. Gaster. One part consists of the mysterious names of God or angels, and another part of the diseases which recital of the names will cure. Thus, for baldness say No. 43 over nut-oil and anoint with it ; to send an evil spirit against thy neighbour take a green grasshopper and say over it No. 129 and bury it in an earth-hill and jump over it ; to kill a lion or any other hurtful animal take the dust from under the

right foot, say over it No. 79, and throw it into their faces. Here if the patient was unsuccessful there would presumably not be the modern need of telling him that he had insufficient faith. And from another recipe we see how modest was the doctor, since "to know if some one sick is going to die or live, say before him No. 90 : if he turns his face towards you he will live, if away he will die."

The Jews were settled more or less throughout Arabia, but principally in the southern province, Yemen ; and they were possessed of their ancestral powers of poetry. Yemen, by the way, must have been a pleasant region :

Und der Sklave sprach : Ich heisze
Mohamed, ich bin aus Yemen,
Und mein Stamm sind jene Asra,¹
Welche sterben, wenn sie lieben.

If the Jews had written in the language of their triumphs it would hardly have seduced their audiences, but now they turned to Arabic.²

¹ Beauty and true love abounded, so they tell us, in the tribe of Asra. Once a member of the tribe was questioned, "What is the matter with your hearts ? They are as the hearts of birds, and dissolve away like salt in water. Why have you not more firmness ?" And he made this answer : "We see eyes of which you do not see the like."

² Among these were the heroic Samuel ben Adiya, his son and grandson. Perhaps we may include Omayya, who wrote satires on Mahomet, though this man was of the Hanif communion, a sort of Jewish Christianity. They

They fired the hearts and the imaginations of the Arabs, and it was agreed by every one that the Jews were the superior people. What they taught of a Messiah was believed, and every one, with faces turned towards Jerusalem, awaited him. The Talmud had been interdicted by Justinian when the Messiah came. Known at first as Kothan, he was welcomed by the Jews as one who would convert Arabia to Judaism. Also the faithful Arabs welcomed him. He changed his name into Mahomet, the Praised, so that he would seem to fulfil a prediction both of the Old and the New Testaments. And when he turned against the Jews he had the faithful Arabs at his back. . . . Now when Abu'l-Ala was writing it appears the Jews were privileged beyond the Christians :

The Christians read their books inside the cells,
The Jews are reading psalms with stars for sentinels.

But all the rulers of the time did not discriminate between the two religions. Hakim, the tyrant of Egypt, who died in the year 1020, forbade both Jewish and Christian women to tread the streets for seven years ; that they should find

had certain Rolls of legal traditions called the "Rolls of Abraham and Moses," but the Talmud tells them that, in company with scoffers, liars, and slanderers, they shall not see God. The satirical Omayya, we should not forget, had once intended that the Prophet should be himself.

it difficult he gave commands forbidding shoemakers and capmakers to work for them. No Christians or Jews could mount an ass or go aboard a ship, and where he did discriminate it was to force the Christians to carry wooden crosses of an inconvenient size, and make the Jews have bells suspended at their necks.

Tolerance, when you come to think of it, does not denote a very gracious attitude; but the number is not small of men who give the name of Dark Ages to some out of the periods of history which are dark to them, and such folk often will assert that, anyhow, in tolerance those populations were inferior to us. But I would rather have a blind and foolish hatred than a dull-eyed tolerance. Suppose it possible for any wise man to be certain that his way of thinking is the best for others, and should, for that reason, be diffused, then he would walk far closer to the man who blindly hates than to the man who merely tolerates. Hormizd IV. of Persia cannot ever have tolerated the Christians, whereas it is conceivable that he once hated them and subsequently grew to wisdom ere he made his answer to the priests when they demanded of him that he should deprive the Christians of his favour. "As our royal throne," he said, "cannot stand on its front legs alone, so our rule cannot stand and be firm if we turn against us the Christians and members of other

alien religions. Cease, therefore, your attacks on the Christians, and follow zealously good works, that the Christians and others of alien faith may see them and give praise and be drawn towards your faith. . . ." I fear we cannot say, as yet, how many centuries he was before his time. And while he lived the Pagans of Arabia were singing. They were passionate, imaginative, free; but they would not have sung so clearly had they not been free of Islam. And what did official Islam hold of them? Worshippers of sun and stars and angels, some of them believed in a future state,¹ while others, curiously, had no faith in a creation or a resurrection, but ascribed the origin of all things to Nature and their dissolution to age.² We cannot think that such men were depraved, but what

¹ We will not go so far as von Kremer, and believe because the Arabs had no future tense that none of them had any thoughts of a future. There was no such tense in the Assyrian language, but that people certainly believed in a future life. And the Arabs did have something to replace this imperfection of their language: they employed a prefix that was a shortened form of the word "finally." Thus, when they said, "Finally he goes," they meant: "He will go." Besides, to prove that they did cherish sometimes the idea of a future life, we have the men who wished a camel to be buried with them, so that in the hereafter they would not have to walk. And other men declared that, from their corpse, a bird would rise and would return to their grave at intervals of a hundred years.

² Cf. the Preliminary Discourse to Sale's translation of the Koran.

is the opinion of Mahometan Arabia ? Is the poets' principal defect an absence of Islamism or the presence of Paganism ?

It is better, I suppose, to speculate and never learn than not to speculate at all. And frequently, confronted by two similar effects, we go our way and think the causes have not been dissimilar. Mahomet was averse from portraiture, so was Plotinus ; but while the Prophet's reason was religious, that of the profound Egyptian was philosophic. "It is the image of an image," so he said. "Why perpetuate the human form, seeing that it is itself an image of reality ?"

III

THE RISE OF ISLAM AND THE FALL OF POETRY

I do not blame the world ; if any blame
There is my shoulder will support the same.
Are not the grape, the wine, the bottle free
From error when the drinking sullies me ?

BUT Mahomet did not share the philosophic wisdom of Abu'l-Ala. The spectacles through which the Prophet looked on life were of untinted glass. He was a cold, a grim ascetic. "Not in this world," he proclaimed, "shall the desires of man be satisfied. So turn your thoughts away to Paradise!" And with a flaming eloquence he called upon his tribe to leave their many gods and lift their eyes to that which was eternal. His entreaty grew to be the battle-cry of millions : "The world has no delight for man ! Let us abandon it !" So, rushing in the Prophet's train, they captured half the world.

To-day where a Bedawi shepherd looks across the stony wilderness a grave Bedawi looked upon a battle. Rows of lances brilliant in the sunlight, horses, bowmen nearly naked ; then a single combat, and he watches how they work the swords, he thinks of what a Moslem told him, that this weapon is the key of heaven and hell ; afterwards the ranks, family by family, are flung into the tumult. Behind them are the women shrieking blame, encouragement ; sometimes they chant a legendary song. He sees Mahomet, his exultant eyes, and watches how his hand from time to time strays through the beard. . . . Down comes the night to separate the foes, an aching silence has succeeded to the frenzy and the clamour ; the Bedawi broods. And little voices murmur in the wind : "The world has no delight for man ! Let us abandon it !" Another voice replies : "Untrue ! untrue ! we followed him because of his success." And through the darkness floats a cry : "Not in this world shall the desires of man be satisfied. So turn your thoughts away to Paradise !" And then : "Untrue ! untrue ! my own desires I satisfied."

They captured half the world. A concourse of tribes became a nation, rolling over Africa and Asia and Europe, founding capitals in Spain and Mesopotamia. The flag of Islam was to wave in the Byzantine and the Persian capitals,

Constantinople and the pearl-white Ctesiphon. The city founded by the Parthians had in the seventh century become a place of splendour ; hunts and river-picnics were accompanied by music, the performers being brought in pleasure-boats—*et cent musiciens faisant rage sur l'eau*. To-day when British boats go down the curving Tigris a pedestrian has opportunity of making several short-cuts ; for instance, he may disembark and visit Ctesiphon, which now consists of Chosrau's ruined arch, and then regain the steamer. Savage animals were chained before the ruler's throne in Ctesiphon so that the populace should be impressed ; to-day these animals may roam at will. But a wonderful success of statecraft shall not purge your private sins, and Mahomet has to answer for the sin of not believing in himself. The varied acts of tyranny and broken faith, vindictiveness and treachery were in that far-distant age the common armour of a politician ; thus he shall not be blamed for using them. Besides, he did not cease to watch and pray, and always lived in very simple fashion, which is much to be commended seeing that, as he himself explained, he was exempt in his position as the Vicar of God from that old Arabian custom of dividing all the plunder equally. But the man did not believe in himself ; at the beginning of his arduous campaign, when he was fighting for the one true God, there was

in him a grand enthusiasm. "Strive always," says Mutannabi—

Strive always for the highest, you will gain the highest seat,
And have the half-moon's silver for the covering of your feet.

Afterwards he wavered, saying there had been revealed from heaven those orders he desired to have obeyed on earth. Such proceedings one may try to palliate by thinking that he was himself deceived, accepting as a revelation what he thought of in his cataleptic fits. And also for establishing a State it was almost essential that the man should be regarded as a Prophet,¹ the religious and the social being intertwined. And also, when it comes to blaming people for the disregard of their convictions, we must not forget le grand Desplein of Balzac's *La Messe de l'Athée*. . . . With regard to women the restrictions which Mahomet placed on other men were, as we have remarked, most serious for poetry and life. But zeal of conquest and the changed conditions were as much responsible for stifling poetry. The Koran took the place of it. And yet this period² has Duraid and al-Khansa. Duraid was a famous poet and a man who strug-

¹ In fact a Moslem is required to put his faith in 124,000 prophets, of different ranks. Jesus is said, in the Koran, to have been a prophet from childhood, and to have wrought miracles surpassing those of all the other prophets—even of Mahomet.

² Cf. Sir Charles Lyall's *Ancient Arabian Poetry*.

gled against Islam. When he had divorced his wife he came one day by the tents of Sulaim, where he saw al-Khansa, daughter of the chief. She was the most distinguished poetess among the Arabs, but was then anointing a sick camel of her father's with some pitch, and had removed most of her garments to be more at ease. Now Duraid was a man of seventy, but he loved her, and composed a poem on his passion and the camel and the lady. He visited her father on the following day, when he received from al-Khansa, who was behind a curtain, this reply : " Do you think I would leave my cousins, who are bright as spear-heads, and marry an old man who will be an owl¹ to-morrow ? " So the suitor went away, and in a poem censured her for lamentable taste. She was urged to write a poem on Duraid. " I have rejected him, that is enough," she said, " I will not satirise him also."

There lived in the twelfth century a judge of judges of Seville, one Ibnol Arabi. He tells us that he understands, from excellent magicians, that in every sura of the Koran is a verse against which all the powers of magic are of no avail. And certainly the Koran is remarkable. Its order and the logic have those imperfections you would look for in a volume that was written from day to day, to meet the necessities of the moment. Yet sometimes in the Koran is a

¹ That is, will soon be dead.

majesty which has been surpassed by no religious book. One does not, as a rule, in estimating a religion stop to think if its philosophy be fine or feeble ; otherwise Mahomet could not bear comparison with Buddha. Believing, like Abu'l-Ala, that the universe is a chain of necessities, of decomposition and recombination, Buddha spent his time in teaching a noble, godless philosophy and a most elevated system of ethics. But the conversion, in the year B.C. 250, of Asoka, whose domain was from Madras to Kabul, brought it about that Buddhism was changed from an obscure local sect to one of the great world-religions, nor could they preserve unchanged and uncorrupted the austerity. When it was taken out of India it was unsuited to non-Indian minds. They wanted above them a divine power, a compensating heaven ; and Buddha, who never prayed to any god, became a god himself at the hands of his foreign disciples. He was represented, first of all, by symbols—a pair of footprints or an empty chair. That is to be seen at Sanchi in the relief sculptures which date from about 200 B.C. But in those from Gandhara, of the second century A.D., Buddha has become a copy of the Græco-Roman statues of Apollo. Once the Buddhist faith was preached by men who thought the gods were empty shadows and who did not raise an altar, not even to the unknown god. But the Koran is

provided with a hell. "I swear," says Mahomet, "that it is one of the most serious things." It also has a Paradise, an orchard which is traversed by streams of flowing water, and is full of falling fruit and women.¹ But if we judge the Koran as a work of literature we perceive therein much merit. Elegant and pure, passionate, magnificent are many places; indeed, Mahomet was a master of rhythmical prose. There had not arisen yet among the Arabs any reputable school of prose. The current style was awkward and pretentious, but Mahomet wielded it with such a skill that he could not resist the use of it on inappropriate occasions. Precepts with regard to gaming, washing, food, inheritance are not adaptable to rhyme, and yet the form was then so popular that nobody could have too much of it. Now and then Mahomet is obliged to introduce unnecessary words,² to change the order of his words, and

¹ Cf. from a Tragedy that was written in the year 1720 and was called *Abra-Mulè*; or, *Love and Empire*:

Solyman. Yet ev'n your Anger charms, and you appear
Awfully fair, and lovely in your Frowns.
Not our great Prophet's self enjoys such Beauty
In the delicious Groves of Paradise,
When on sweet Beds of Flow'rs—

Abra-Mulè. If any thing
Can possibly be more offensive to me
Than Flatt'ry, 'tis Prophaneness.

² Cf. Nöldeke, *De Origine et Compositione Surarum Quorani-carum ipsiusque Qorani.*

even change a word's pronunciation so that he may keep the rhyme ; but even such a prose accommodates itself more easily than verse to subjects which are generally thought prosaic. One Pherecydes of Syros, who lived some ages after Homer, was the first among the Greeks to publish prose. In the poetic ages law was put in metre.

Should a man possess the qualities you like, then you would never ask if he has got them accidentally. So we must give honour to the Koran, thinking of the diverse flowers that were grown upon it. We have come out to see that in this period the Koran murdered poetry, but we should have a most erroneous picture of the time if we imagine that the shadow of Mahomet fell upon all radiant things with an impenetrable darkness. It is not in all conditions, under all the skies¹ that poetry can live, and, luckily, the unpoetic ages are not to be condemned without a hearing. We may discover in them

¹ In *Les Occasions Perdues* . . . General Izzet Fuad Pasha says that "on July 22nd we received the news of the first success of Plevna. This telegram, too long and in a language hardly military, seemed to be exaggerated, for Gourko's raid had given rise to much discouragement. The whole camp was delighted . . . but hesitated to believe, one reason being that the telegram was written in the form of an epic poem. "I don't believe a word of it!" cried the commander-in-chief. . . . That was the moment for attack, the moment was come, it was let slip—owing to the telegram's unseasonable poetry."

certain qualities of thought, imagination, enterprise that go to make your poets. But even so this age, perhaps, would not detain us if it were not that the poets of our third and brilliant period are so profoundly different from the pre-Islamic poets ; much of the difference is due to men who in the second period were sowing. Astronomy, philology, history, geography—but what they studied first was the reading of the Koran. This was taught in the mosque of Kufa by one Abu Abd as Sulami who died in the year 74 of the Hegira, that is A.D. 683. Then, after some fifty years, grammar was taught in the mosques publicly. The professors at this early time were in receipt of no remuneration other than the presents it was customary for a pupil to supply when he was leaving for another class. It was considered highly scandalous that money should be taken by a teacher of theology. " You have made a falcon of religion, wherewith to catch your victim," cried Ibn al Mubarak to some teacher who gave out that he was ready to be paid. But the system of the presents on promotion might, one fancies, with a needy master lend itself to clear abuses. And the pupils, at a later period, become more reconciled to paying for their lessons, though it was regarded as a necessary evil. Yet we have, as late as the twelfth century, a noted instance of a teacher who would receive no presents nor take any

payment. Ibn al Hutaya was a great and celebrated saint who lived outside the city of Old Cairo. The lessons which he gave were on how to read the Koran, but even when the famine came across his threshold he would accept no money from the pupils. So they determined unanimously that one of their number, al-Fadl Ibn Yahya, who was a tall man, a draper and a notary of Cairo, should beg his daughter's hand. This marriage having taken place, the husband asked permission for the mother of his wife to come and live with her; and this was granted. However, Ibn al Hutaya was exceptional, because another school at Cairo, known as "the house of wisdom," had been in prosperous existence for a century and more. Amid the details given us by al Makrizi we observe that the annual revenue was 2,570 dinars,¹ whereof 12 were devoted to the repair of books, 5 to the carpet for winter, 8 to palm-leaves with which to strew the floor in winter, 15 to the farrash who kept order, and 48 to the librarian, while salaries were paid to jurisconsults, Koran-readers, astronomers, grammarians, philologists and physicians.

Astronomy began by being cultivated, as was the case with other sciences, for a religious

¹ The dinar, whose name was borrowed from the Romans' silver denarius, was the gold coin of the Moslems, and was then worth about ten shillings.

purpose. It was the means by which men ascertained the time for prayer as also the direction of Mecca, whither they were wont to turn their mosques. Before Mahomet they advanced no further in astronomy than to foretell the weather from a star and give the star a name. Subsequently they made striking progress and surpassed the Greeks. . . . Biography was practised with a view to studying the characters of the traditionists. So numerous were the traditions¹ which had reference to the sayings and the doings of Mahomet that it became essential to discriminate: a tradition was accepted only if the character was good of all the men by whom it had been handed down, but the tradition was rejected if one member of the line displayed inadequate veracity or piety. Before this time the Prophet's followers had given much attention to preserving genealogies, so that the captured treasure might be properly distributed. There was a census taken whose object, unlike that of Domesday, was to give. The people were arranged into families according as they were related to

¹ "La science de la tradition," says Bossuet, "est la vraie science ecclésiastique; le reste est abandonné aux curieux, même à ceux du dehors, comme l'a été, durant tant de siècles la philosophie aux païens. . . ." The collecting of traditions was encouraged by Mahomet. "Whosoever has collected forty, him I declare will God, on the Day of Judgment, send as a learned man into Paradise."

Mahomet, and preference was shown to men who had been speedy in accepting Islam or had taken part in Islam's battles or had special knowledge of the Koran. From this it was, of course, a great advancement to biography, and after the beginning we have indicated books of anecdotes and memoirs increased prodigiously. Suffice it if we mention one of the tenth century, el-Morsebani's very useful *Book of Poets*. Not only does he give selections and their author's pedigree, but is so finished a biographer that he devotes one section of his book to "what is said about the burdens and the frailties of poets,¹ of their personalities and their physical faults, such as limping, squinting, having one eye, having none, being leprous, and of those with faults in other limbs, narrated limb by limb." El-Morsebani undertakes to tell what were the religions of the poets, and another section speaks of those who were too proud to write when Islam had been introduced, of those who sang but of one single object, and of those who were too kind to continue writing satires. . . . History was also one to whom the Koran was a mother, a reluctant mother. When it was allowed to be, religion said that it must do no more than mark the ways of God to man.

¹ "The poetry of Mr. Leigh Hunt," said a *Blackwood* reviewer, "is such as might be expected from the personal character and habits of its author."

Some of the swarm of histories which followed have a value when they do not strain immoderately to be beautiful. One does not ask for truth ; indeed “ if God should offer me with one hand Truth,” said Lessing, “ with the other Search for Truth, then would I have the second.” Better that historians should search for truth, and with less eagerness for beauty. In Arabia were some¹ who wrote too preciously, while others wrote too carelessly, like the royal Abu'l-Feda, who would not command his grammar. Lastly, some historians pursued the middle way. . . . With regard to geography the Koran—I can hear some critic saying—patronised no place but heaven. Still the road to Mecca was now made familiar, because the man who does not go the pilgrimage may just as well die Jew or Christian, says Mahomet. And the books about the various roads are the most ancient books of Moslem geography. One need have no consideration for those early writers who declined to travel, and did nothing more than to repeat each other, so that in their work a place is frequently described in glowing colours when it has become a ruin. By the bye, in northern Africa there is among the Moors to-day the most pathetic custom of delivering from father down to son the key of their ancestral home in Andalucia, which has long since been

¹ Cf. Michaelis, *Arabische Grammatik*, 1781.

a ruin or not even that. We may have more confidence in Yakubi, who really was a traveller, a son of the road, as Arabs say. But for an accurate account we turn to books about the post-routes. At every station were some horses in the government employ—one recognised it by the strange, distinctive mode in which their tails were cut—and at every station dwelt a man who was supposed to furnish the authorities with notes on agriculture, coinage, the position of the peasants and the conduct of the local governor. Such information he would give, no doubt, unless he and the governor were too friendly. But if a traveller had wisdom he became on friendly terms with him. And sometimes, with a greater wisdom, he would plunge into the swirling seas of life. “Powerful princes have lent me their ear and anon I have joined a band of robbers or sat as a retail-dealer in the bazaar,” says Mokaddasi, who died in the year 985. “I have enjoyed much honour and consideration, but I have been destined also to listen to many curses, and to be reduced to the ordeal of the oath, when I was suspected of heresy or evil deeds.” As a whole the geographical achievement of the Arabs was not trifling; they corrected many lapses of the Greeks in longitude and latitude. . . . Here, then, are some out of the paths of knowledge which the Arabs trod. And hardly less important

than the written word is that whereon they wrote. It was the custom, in the first two centuries of the Hegira, to have recourse to skins or bones or potsherds. "Everything that we have need to know," declared the followers of Jaafer as Sadik, an imam, "and everything which is to happen till the Day of Judgment has been written by our imam on the skin of a four-month-old kid." This man who wrote was born in the year A.D. 699. But these conditions were supplanted during the third century of the Hegira, when it was no longer necessary to rely on skins or bones or Egyptian papyrus. Chinese paper was imported and was manufactured in the northern districts of Arabia, probably of cotton. Afterwards a Chinaman who came to Samarkand was the first who demonstrated the utility of flax. And as paper could be made more easily and cheaply, knowledge came to be accessible to every seeker. Thus Abu'l-Ala could say :

Knowledge is a lock, and you may find the key,
Supposing that you strive and struggle ceaselessly.
Before you gain some end from toil you may not shrink,
Before you raise the cup it is not well to drink.

IV

THE WEAKENING OF ISLAM AND THE RISE OF POETRY

ONE day in the tenth century some grammarians were going on a pleasure trip from Bassora. They did not wish to waste the time, and were less fortunate than Selim er Rasi, the philologer, who, when he was cutting pens or walking, was accustomed to recite a passage of the Koran or the names of God. Now the grammarians from Bassora thought it would be opportune if they went through a Koran Imperative ; but certain countryfolk, gatherers of dates, were vexed and soundly cudgelled them. A time was coming when the court of Baghdad smiled on those who laughed at Islam, if—this was the one condition—they believed in nothing else. And even as the pietistic attitude was now relinquished by the gatherers of dates, so did other cities bring their powers to bear upon the Koran. What in former times had been considered to be God's eternal, uncreated word was by the Sultan Mamun determined to have

been created, and those who said they could not share in his belief were hanged. A publicist, al-Kindi, wrote that, very far from being God's eternal, uncreated word, the Koran was inspired by Christian monks, was presently aggrandised with some Jewish tales, and was collected in a loose, haphazard fashion. The Dervish of Chorassan, Abu Said,¹ was allowed to write his quatrains on the attributes of God ; two centuries before him lived a Sufi who propounded, "I am God," and was slain by torture. Abu Said put the same thing in a different way : "Deny your own existence, affirm that of God. Behold the meaning of the form, 'There is no God but God.'" And his words became the prayers of the faithful. Of course they were not understood, but even so they would have probably sufficed to kill the Sufi. Al-Biruni speaks about a controversial correspondence² which was written for the sake of damning Islam. A certain Abdullah the Hashimite sent a letter of twenty-two pages to Abd al Masih al-Kindi inviting him to embrace Islam ; thereupon al-Kindi wrote an answer of one hundred and

¹ Cf. Darmesteter, *Les Origines de la Poésie Persane*.

² This method is, at all events, much more polite than that which, carried on by the Prophet and Amra the Ghassanite, was responsible for the first war between Islam and Christianity. Letters of a missionary character were sent to Amra by Mahomet, and the Ghassanite, regarding this as an insult, executed the messenger.

forty-two pages, refuting Abdullah's arguments and inviting him to be a Christian. If he had allowed himself to be convinced he would have had no reason, at all events no worldly reason, to repent; for with less inclination to venerate the Koran there was more freedom for the different religions, for philosophic speculations and for poetry. No longer did the Moslem jurists quarrel as to whether soldiers had the right to kill a Christian priest, or whether he should be regarded as a kind of dervish. Now the disabilities from which the Christians suffered were entirely due to the paternal care of Government, which put a close to internecine strife between Nestorians and Jacobites by laying down that Baghdad should not be the permanent abode of the Jacobite Metropolitan. As for the sacred buildings, not only were the churches and the monasteries very numerous but Christian monks, unlike the followers of Islam, were allowed to sell wine publicly. One of the functions of the versatile police was to prevent the open sale of wine—*in vino veritas*—by Moslems, but on the other hand they were forbidden usually to force their way into a private dwelling¹

¹ Thus in Berlin the police may enter private houses only after six o'clock in the morning. When cobbler Voigt, the ragamuffin officer of Koepenick, was traced through treachery a number of police were stationed round and on the house; but until six o'clock they could not introduce themselves and seize their prey.

or to permit the peace of any one to be disturbed by supercurious neighbours. And the morals of a Moslem were in some degree controlled by the police ; a Christian convent, on the other hand, was able to receive both men and women. Al-Junaid, the ascetic who died at Baghdad in the year 906, has told us that a slave-girl was presented to him since a song of hers, wherein he felt a mystic undercurrent, made him swoon. He declared before God that the girl was free, and "afterwards," he says, "I gave her to one of our companions in the convent, and she had by him a lusty boy who grew up well." The convents, as a rule, were situated in alluring scenery and they were visited by notables who wanted change of air. So much for the Christians ; we have a picture also of the chief rabbi going to an audience of the caliph. Many cavaliers attend him, the turban which he wears is white, the robe is of embroidered silk, and heralds go before him crying, "Make way for the son of David !" Every man arises, Jew and Moslem.

This was indeed a time when shackles were discarded. Predestination had been thrown upon the people by their Prophet, acting as a politician. There had been, in pre-Islamic times, a sort of theory of life. Although the search for causes had been deprecated by Semitic peoples—"Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher"—yet we find that in the early chapters of the Koran is main-

tained the doctrine of free will: "Every man," it says, "is hostage for that which he deserves." And now the philosophic views of life were brought again into the public air. Chief of them was Neo-Platonism, and what forces one to take a backward glance is not so much because that philosophic system had originated in the third Christian century as because there dwelt in it the elements of old philosophies. It will not be needful for us to go back with Brucker and inquire into the philosophic systems which prevailed before the Deluge. Rather shall we listen to Descartes when he pronounces in his *Discours de la Méthode* that "men who give up too much time to travel grow at last to be as strangers in their own land, while such as are too fond of prying into things of other epochs will not seldom stay in ignorance of things which flourish now." But Neo-Platonism is like a sea—perhaps the Dead Sea—whose water has been carried down by various streams. The Stoic more especially contributes to the Neo-Platonist. With regard to whether Stoicism came from Asia, it is thought that one should praise the Greek, and not his Asiatic ancestors, for Greek philosophy. One of the most convincing arguments is that the source of Zeno's system should be Greek, although this man who founded Stoicism had not only Asiatic ancestors but was by race half a Phœnician. So we say

that Greek philosophy was taken over by the Arabs.¹ Whether it was taken with fair judgment is another question. There have not been wanting people in Arabia to say that Arabs did not understand the Greek philosophy, nor has that carping been unjustifiable. But even the philosophers were hard upon themselves. "If you do not understand what Aristotle teaches and even if you act as Aristotle would have acted, then," cries Farabi, "you are not so good as he who knows his Aristotle and rejects him." Poor Farabi's knowledge was of such a sort that he denied there was a difference, except in phraseology or unimportant details, between Aristotle and Plato! There was in the Syrian a desire not so much to play the critic as to build a final, perfect theory of life. And other men in other ages set themselves the task of showing that there was no difference between two rival schools: "Between the Moslem and the Pro-

¹ The Christians of Syria were those who introduced Greek culture to the Arabs. At first the school of Edessa was the most important. This was closed in the year 489, and being reopened in Nisibis it was patronised by the Sassanides. Here so much esteem was given to religion that in the year 590 the Holy Scriptures were not allowed to be read in any room which contained books on worldly topics. Another Christian school, for philosophic and medical studies, existed at Gondeshapur, in Persia. The translations from the Greek were usually much more accurate in logic and natural science than in ethics and metaphysics. Herein the obscure was often misunderstood or omitted.

testant there is," quoth Martinus Alphonsus Vivaldus, "no difference; in fact they have precisely thirteen points in common—both of them allow divorce, reject the worship of the Saints, support themselves on what is written down, and so forth." "Likewise between the followers of Pope and Prophet there is no difference," said Reland who flourished about the year 1700—"both of them enjoin the prayers for the dead, believe in pilgrimages to the Holy Places, in the intercession of angels, and so forth." Arguments like these may not find welcome nowadays, but even as one recommends a house with many somewhat dirty windows rather than a solitary window which is clean, so does the perfect knowledge of a single system fall inferior to the study, prejudiced, partial and imperfect, of rival systems. When the Koran weighed less drearily upon the land, philosophers arose and looked about them. Neo-Platonism had been thriving in the Græco-Roman world until the middle of the sixth century; what now became the tenet of Arabian philosophers was Neo-Platonism modified, because they looked upon the Persians also and the Indians. Alas! we cannot cease from criticising: what the Moslems took from India was not of India's best. We can agree with the industrious Biruni declaring that "India, not to mention Arabia, has produced no Socrates," but what she did produce were

ethics and metaphysical speculations. These, however, did not make so much impression on the true believers, idol-breakers, as did the local idol-worship and the images of Buddha. It is true that various philosophers among the Moslems gained a knowledge of some principles of Buddha's faith, such as the belief in metempsychosis, but the philosophic enterprise of Arabs cannot rouse within us great enthusiasm. Failure is not always more estimable than success. We shall not think more highly of the Romans' Neo-Platonism when recalling that it strove in vain to rescue from the flood of Christianity the forms of Grecian culture. Nor shall the Arabs' Neo-Platonism be admired because the Koran ultimately overwhelmed it. But because it groped among the shadows we must not disdain it.

Now we come to poetry ; and here it is essential that we should have the courage of our own opinions. If we try to follow such a recognised authority as Ibn Khallikan we shall be led astray. The renascence of poetry was so terrific that one thinks it would have been a simple task to catalogue the men who did not write. And Ibn Khallikan, apparently, was too good-natured to omit a single versifier and a single adjective of approbation. Prose does not present so many pitfalls to the critic ; but Ibn Khallikan does not escape them when he treats, for instance,

of al-Hasan, who died in the year 728, and was given a remarkable funeral. The mother of this man was by profession a story-teller to the women. One day al-Hassan came to see her and he found that she was eating onions. "O mother," he exclaimed, "throw away that nasty weed." "O my son," she answered, "you are aged and advanced in years; sometimes you dote." Then he retorted, "Mother, which of us is the elder?" And Ibn Khallikan, having quoted this, remarks of al-Hassan's phrases that they were maxims of wisdom and models of elegance. So, while our gratitude to Ibn Khallikan is of the greatest, we must not cling to him when he goes out beyond his depth. He does not seem to have a faultless taste in humour; otherwise he would have made a different comment on Ibn al Mukaffar, an author whom Sofyan, the governor of Bassora, slew in a fashion we need not describe. This Ibn al Mukaffar used to make free with the governor; in fact, he was accustomed to address him as 'son of the lascivious female.' "And this appellation," says Ibn Khallikan, "was injurious to the honour of Sofyan's mother. . . ." Looking at the multitude of poets handed down to us we cannot but recall a saying of Abu'l-Ala :

When that the new moon's hoof into the full moon grows—
Ah, many a little moon her limitation knows.

Verse was now considered as an item of your education ; the learned Avicenna wrote in verse his treatises on logic, science and medicine. But because the versifiers were immoderate in quantity they were not always moderate in quality. Viziers and carpenters, grammarians and oculists—they wrote in verse and sometimes very well. There is a neatness in this poem by one Ibn Ebi Moas el Masirnabadi, a Persian carpenter who wrote in Arabic :

Tell the Sheik that is the lantern
 Of this earth and of the time,
 Of the strong administration,
 Sheik of those who murder crime ;
 Say that I have dedicated
 Unto him the present rhyme.
 See, the lip moves ! Oh, the parlance
 Must, as ever, be sublime :
 “ Man, you have the Sheik’s permission
 Both for this and every time ! ”

There is neatness also in the lines of Ibner Rumi :

Think otherwise of me, for it is wrong
 To scowl because my praises are so long.
 As there lay very little in the well,
 I could not use a shorter rope of song.

And there is something more than neatness in the lines of el-Bohtori :

Now gardens underneath a tender rain
 Of spring assume the robe of stripes again.

Old furtive winter from the joyous rout,
Like some detected swindler, passes out.
We see the waters of Bathias flow,
Whereon the gorgeous vessels come and go.
What time it rains the drops are as a band
Of lucent pearls, flung by the self-same hand.
Within the light there is a redness made
Of rubies, mingled with the green of shade.
And when the dew-drops fall upon the stream
They rise like fairies' bosoms, when they dream.

And when Ahmed Ibnol Chajjath, the praiser of kings, arrived as a young man in Aleppo he entered the house of Abu'l-Hassan. "Where do you come from ?" asked the older man. "Damascus." "What is your trade ?" "Poetry." "Let me hear," said Abu'l Hassan. "Alas !" quoth he,

"Alas, I have no wares to sell—
Look at my rags !
It is but honour that I bring,
And who will buy so grave a thing ?"

"Stay with me," said Abu'l Hassan. "What for ?" "To make poetry, for Syria has many poets." Then he gave him money. But in the market-place, where common language was poetic, one could encounter poets who complained that when they sang it was not thought extraordinary. "Nourishment for nightingales !" is the call of the cake-seller. "Mother of two

fires ! " exclaims the vendor of well-roasted peas. And the venerable Abu Hilal el Askeri sang :

I stand among the market fops,
Which are the weeds of all the crops.
No breath of good will rise, I know,
From this vain profit-seeking row.
What splendid irony—they scorn
Me, and because my coat is torn !

The market was indeed a spot wherein the literary people congregated. Some, with their bodies swaying to and fro, recited from the Koran, others who had written books were listening to the dealer's voice uplifted in advertisement, others plied the pen of public writers—maybe after having tried in vain to please the public with their writing they were writing now just what the public wanted. Then a poetess, er ribas Omm Kolfum, comes through, riding on her elephant ; she sings what she has written, and a man called Sherif hears two lines of the cassida :

A monstrous, ruddy wind are we,
The mother of the cooling orange-tree.

And the fate of foreigners has summoned them to Baghdad : Moors from Andalucia in pursuit of wisdom, savage Seljuks for the caliph's body-guard, Indian merchants with bamboos to be the handles of Arabian lances, foreign corpses

on the Tigris bridge—for now the fate of many lands is interwoven with Arabia. And, as new words were brought from all the districts of Arabia when the pre-Islamic poets were assembled in the month of pilgrimage, so now from foreign lands were brought fresh images and more philosophy. Thus did the poems of Abu'l-Atahija, of the brilliant Mutannabi, of Abu'l-Ala fly through an atmosphere undreamed of by the early Arabs. Wings were put upon the Muse, but none of them came from Byzantium, which was so irretrievably prosaic that when George Pachymeres saw Damascus he declared, in something like a lyric rapture, that it—yes, it—that it was fair. Spaniards and Persians and Egyptians were, at any rate, much more ambitious, and their poetry much more sustained. Mysticism dwelt in Egypt, for example in the work of Ibn Farid, an admirable poet. Pantheism, romanticism, Sufism were cultivated by the Persians, whose national literature began in the ninth century. As a Sufi poet, bringing to the world of letters the desire to reconcile philosophy with revealed religion, one may touch on Abu Said, whose reported dialogue, if so it may be called, with Avicenna goes to demonstrate that science is much loftier than intuition.¹

¹ Avicenna said : "He sees as well all that I know." Abu Said said : "He knows all that which I do not see." Such tales, however, and their opposites, circulated by the

And, looking on the greatest poets of Arabia, we see that ancient standards have been swept away. There was at first a shining spirit of revolt which, under Haroun al Rashid, flung aside the old and did not take upon itself a new restraint. The poems of Abu Nowas, his drinking songs and so forth, are chiefly marked by cynicism and unseemliness. But the chief of the police at Baghdad, el Hadshadsh, was unrivalled for the levity and wantonness of his poems. Greater than Abu Nowas was Abu'l-Atahija, with whom began Arabia's philosophic poetry. Born at Kufa, where the manufacture of traditions was so vigorously prosecuted that the very term 'tradition of Kufa' became synonymous with forgery—one man, Ibn Aby Auga, confessing before his execution in the year 772 that he had set in circulation four thousand false traditions—Abu'l-Atahija was grave and pessimistic, and the learned folk are said to have despised him because of his belief that one should write for all to understand. He set his face against

men who do not love a scientific proof, are not always capable of being proved. We likewise have our legends whose design it is to prove that science is inferior to intuition. One of them is founded on a flower which was seen by Tennyson and Kelvin walking down a Surrey lane. This legend is so healthy that it found its way, three years ago, into a sermon in the English Church at Aix-les-Bains. Of course the preacher did not know that in his congregation were Lord and Lady Kelvin, or that on the best authority this legend was declared erroneous.

the common Arab practices of word-juggling and plagiarism. In fact, there is only Ibn al Motazz who attempts to regulate our admiration for this poet.

We may stop a moment to admire some of the critics' own productions. Here are lines that have resemblance to a Japanese picture :

Our old moon put her horns away and the dark nights were
three ;

There danced a girl-moon through the clouds, pallid as ivory.
At break of day went Jupiter patrolling down the sky,
Just as the lonely watchman with a lantern passing by.

He exchanged verses with the slave-girl Chisani,
for when she renounced wine and began to be
pious he wrote :

So now you pass along a thoroughfare
With face averted from the vineyards there.
You give a rose to me, as if to say
That all things speedily shall pass away.

And she replied :

Son of the highest, in your pearlèd speech
What others think you generously teach.
Myself I listened to the years that kill—
Ah, would that I were unconverted still.

The mind of Ibn al Motazz was prompt, they tell us, in conceiving original ideas of great beauty ; he was wont to say that four poets

had a character contrary to that of their works : Abu'l-Atahija's were noted for piety, but he himself was an atheist, while the other three poets had the unpleasant qualities of a baboon, a goat and a dog, but their poetry had not.

Here is Abu'l-Atahija's poem on the burial of his son :

Full is my sorrow now that you are dead,
And I have thrown the dust upon your head.
In other days I preached unendingly,
But now, my little boy, you preach to me.

Of Mutannabi, the wise and proud and noble, the grand, the grandiose we shall do better not to speak than merely mention.

Nor does Mutannabi offer us encouragement :

Ah, the black swarm of the poets have emptied reproaches
upon me—

What is incurably rotten is not adapted for praise.
Lips that have drunk of the foulness of putrified waters
Cry that the heart of a crystalline torrent is foul.

He was perhaps the foremost man of his time, and when he would not praise the vizier el Mohellibi this personage incited other poets to attack him. One of them proclaimed that Mutannabi was the son of a water-carrier, and the great man, unable to support such treatment, took a camel in the night and fled from Baghdad. Of such importance is he that the *Jetimet* devotes

a section to the thoughts and pictures which he stole from other poets and to those which other poets stole from him. This very el Mohellibi is among the thieves. Said Mutannabi :

The parting was suspected when eyelids 'gan to part.
They bled, and all the sorrow was tearing through my heart.

And these are the words of the vizier :

With your departure eyelids will be parted,
Nor will they close before the tears have started.

Arab of the Arabs, overbearing, conceited, subtle, using strange words that one might think him learned, yet his words went soaring on tremendous and most lovely thoughts. Before he started on the voyage that was ended by assassination at the hand of robbers he made a farewell song, with which we shall take leave of him :

Nought am I but an arrow that is expelled into space,
And with no second's delaying shall I return here to you.
Else would I tremble with shame, dear master whom I am
forsaking—
Shame in the presence of God, whose hand is always in yours.

Associated with him at Aleppo was the poet Abu Firas, cousin of the governor Seif ed Dewlet. The style in which he lived was princely. Several times he represented his absent cousin, and,

joining in the expeditions, he was several times a prisoner of the Greeks. Once on the Euphrates he escaped by leaping on horseback from the castle wall into the river. Subsequently he was taken out of Menbedsh¹ and imprisoned in Constantinople. His language, elevated and simple, was naturally used on themes of war.

A learned vizier used to say the art of poetry began and ended with a prince, Imr el Kais and Abu Firas. Mutannabi had the greatest respect for him and this explains, says an historian, why the great man celebrated in his song all other members of the royal house and said no word on Abu Firas. Here are verses written by the prince when he was captive at Constantinople :

O night, why do you work so grievously,
For ever sweeping back old friends to me ?
Behold the sorrow-laden people fall
Upon the breast of sleep, and I may call
For that ; aye, call. The Syrian breezes win
Towards my heart, they softly enter in.
They bring a message o'er the troubled sea,
That many Syrians remember me.

Mutannabi, Abu Firas, and Abu'l-Ala have made us turn our eyes towards Aleppo. No longer was the Syrian town regarded as a mere

¹ The name of this town was afterwards Hierapolis. A change of name is not infrequent thereabouts, e.g. in Genesis : " Bela, which is Zoar."

provincial place, for the caliph's empire was dividing so that Baghdad's ruler did not rule in Syria. The masterful Adhadewlet, of the House of Bujeh, was in power at Baghdad, while his brother, Seif ed Dewlet, held Aleppo.

This poem, by Aleppo's ruler, throws an interesting light upon the local customs :

At last the tavern-keeper heard our cries,
He came with sleep-intoxicated eyes.
Then round and round, like stars, the cups of wine he sent—
Like stars which clamber round the firmament.
There lay the south apparelled in a pall
Of cloud, wherefrom a fringe of showers fall ;
The dusky-coloured garment had been lit
By using rainbows for the seams of it.

Often does this man wage war against Byzantium, and if that neighbour is the one with whom he deals the most, there is another in the south as keen to enter on the fine inheritance. "Aleppo," says Abu'l-Ala, "for him who journeys thither is a garden of Eden, for those who travel away it is a raging fire." So thought Byzantium and Egypt. In the year 969 Aleppo saw the Byzantines. Arms and mules, gold and silver were extorted, and the motley soldiers marched away. In the year 1009 Aleppo was obedient to the commands of an Egyptian vassal. Nor were these her only neighbours. In the year 1033 she saw the powerful Bedawi rushing from the south, overthrowing the Egyptians and

establishing their dynasty, the House of Salih. But the death-year of Abu'l-Ala, 1057, was the year when Egypt sent a vast, victorious army, and Aleppo was Egyptian. Afterwards it fell to Salih's grandson. Afterwards it fell again to Egypt. And if it still resembled Adam's garden the religious bodies flung themselves upon it, as if they were determined that an unbelieving poet's spirit should not breathe o'er Eden. Sects arose more numerous than chapters in the Koran, while the words they uttered signified, in many cases, nothing and were full of sound and fury ; they were a blow, as Arabs say, on iron that is cold. And each religion formed a state within the State. Notorious among them were Carmathians who spread abroad from Kufa, rebelled against the Baghdad caliphs, and were highly favoured by the lords of Egypt. "There is coming," they exclaimed, "an imam ! " Then the poet sang :

" There comes a man of God,"
The people cry,
" And he will save us, he will save
Us from perplexity."
Vain thought ! man's reason is alone
So god-like and so clear,
Which from the morning-star until the night
Shall be the pioneer.

" Our life is nothing," said the poet, " but a

brief repose, and then we travel on. Much better than your imam to reveal the truth, to be infallible is verily the blind man's staff which is a guide to him when he goes down the street." But the Carmathians were not hated by Abu'l-Ala because they did not share in his philosophy. And not because they were opposed to pilgrimages. But because they spurned the Abbassides, and let loose upon the land a giant cause of conflict. Now Syria was in truth a raging fire. Devastated by this enemy or that, her story, while Abu'l-Ala was living, is very much the story of her neighbours. "Barbarous, blaspheming Saracens," says Leo the Byzantine; but his own behaviour towards them was not such as would induce them to make any changes in these habits.

Byzantium was well equipped for warfare at the time when Leo wrote. Not alone were levies furnished by the various warlike nations of the Empire—those which had a peaceful disposition gave assistance of another kind, as when the Greeks provided gold and horses to satisfy the Emperor Romanus's demand for men—but also with the Byzantines was a peculiar sort of skill. Letters could be sent which caused opposing generals to have suspicion of their officers, and very often battles could be cheaply won by means of bribes. And if it came to fighting one could check a savage onrush by

judicious application of Greek fire. This was a substance which dealt consternation: "It is the most horrible thing," says Joinville, "that I have ever seen"; but on land, at all events, it was not very harmful, for St. Louis was uninjured when it covered him. At sea the mixture, squirted out of tubes,¹ is said to have put fire to woodwork on the hostile ships. But naval warfare did not much appeal to Moslems, and although they finally procured a fleet of galleys and of triremes on the Byzantine model, orders had been issued by the caliph Omar that all fighting should occur on land.² Against Byzantine artifice the Syrians could imitate, of course, the shirts of mail; they could not change their modes of thought. "If once they are well beaten," says Leo the Wise, "they take it as a sign of heavenly wrath and lose heart altogether." And Byzantines were not above employing, if they found it useful, just the strategy the Syrians favoured. Both of them would manage not to meet; the Syrians would fall on Cappadocia, and the Byzantines descend

¹ Cf. Charles Oman, *The Art of War in the Middle Ages*.

² The lack of sympathy which Arabs entertained towards the sea may well be noted from the names upon their maps. The Indian Ocean has the title "Sea of Darkness," while Edrisi, writing in the year 1154, constructs a map which has nine islands off the coasts of Africa and Andalucia. None but the penultimate—our own Anklitara—has a name, and all about them is the "Sea of Shadows."

on Northern Syria—which made the border people's life a sorry burden. Yet where they both went raiding one beheld the difference between the Moslem and his prudent foe, because it was the custom of the latter to command the wretched husbandmen to cultivate for him the following harvest. Even if with conquered cities one should think, like Machiavelli, that their ruin is the most effective means for keeping them, it must be said that in the case of open country there is much to make one praise Byzantine methods.

The very year in which the Byzantines were in Aleppo and her roofed bazaars of stone was also when rebellion blazed in Egypt. Royal attributes were taken from the Abbasides and assumed by al-Moizz the Fatimide. No longer was the Friday prayer to be offered up for him who was at Baghdad, no longer was his name to stand upon the coinage. And a military expedition started. We are told that when the Kaid Jawhar, commanding al-Moizz's armies, was about to leave he kissed his master's hand and the hoof of his horse. Then al-Moizz, returning to the palace, sent to Jawhar, as a present, all the clothes which were upon him, save his drawers and ring. The country lying to the north of Egypt was inhabited by powerful Bedawi races, whose adherence to the Abbasides was the slightest possible. They used for their

advantage the enmity which Cairo had for Baghdad. But their consent was sullen when a vassal of the Fatimides was seated at Aleppo. Hakim had succeeded to the caliphate of Egypt, his opinions being preached in Syria were especially repugnant to Abu'l-Ala. "The worst of all," says he, "is the ruler of an empire who demands the payment of divine honours"; which indeed the caliph did expect by virtue of being the tenth incarnation of the Deity. But in the year 1020 he was killed, and Syria became the plunder of Bedawi. Ramleh fell, and the Egyptians were thrown back as far as Ascalon. Enraged at his defeat, the son of Hakim turned against his father's theological opinions and severely persecuted those who clung to them, the martial Druses. But his attitude was natural, because the new religion said that Hakim was not born and never had a child, so that it gave to him the rank of foundling. Meanwhile the Bedawi lorded it in Syria: "I do not blame the deeds of Salih," said Abu'l-Ala, "but I suppose that he is satisfied more easily than I." Fresh armies came from Egypt, Salih fell, his son was at Aleppo for a time and beat a force of Byzantines, and was then beaten by the men of Egypt.

In the turmoil of religious bodies the Carmathians, allegorical interpreters of Islam, were only one of many. Rising up against the rigorous

observance, they dispensed with prayer and fasting, or, to quote their critics, from the first eternal principles of order. At any rate, they were impatient of restrictions, and they held that, as a chosen people, it was fated for them to possess this earth as their inheritance. And they assisted fate by means of clever missionaries that, according to the customs then in vogue, permeated all the empire, founded secret clubs and were instructed, very candidly, to modify their methods in conforming with the temperament of those on whom they chanced to operate. Now the Carmathians had sprung out of Shi'ites, the adherents of Ali, and their arch opponents were the party of the Sunna, who said that they continued the traditions of Mahomet. Though the Shi'ites, spreading over Persia, have embraced religious doctrines of that country, yet first of all they were divided from the Sunnites merely by the fact of their allegiance to Ali and his descendants. So blind a fury grew between the parties that they did not stop to think that Ali, having married Fatima, could not have descendants who were not descendants of the Prophet. Other hostile bodies had their seeds within the Koran, which asserts that, while the actions of a man are predetermined, yet the man is held responsible. The Mo'tazilites, who influenced Abu'l-Ala, were rationalists, and strove against predestination. "The root of

their belief," explains ash-Shahrastani, "lies in their attempt to know the reason for everything, and this was the very root when he before whom no man was accursed began to want to know the wherefore of the creation, and of what use it was to pray to Adam." Nor does ash-Shahrastani favour those reformers who do not accept the theory of predestination. "I have heard," he says, "of the wonderful meeting between Amr ibn al-Asz and Abu Musa al-Ashari. Quoth the first of these : 'Suppose I find one to dispute with me, I will dispute with him, my lord.' Quoth the second : 'Such a one am I, who undertake the contest.' Says al-Asz : 'So, then, God settles that I am to do the deed and afterwards will punish me ?' Says al-Ashari : 'Yes.' Says al-Asz : 'And why ?' Says al-Ashari : 'Because he inflicts no injustice upon you.'" Then, we are told, was Abu ibn al-Asz silent, and he found no answer. But Jabarites and Szifatites and Malikites and Hanifites and Shafi'ites and Hanbalites were far from silent. It was with the utmost energy that Jabarites denied the attributes of God, for example goodness, but affirmed that God essentially is good ; the Szifatites cried loudly for the literal reading of the Koran ; Malik demanded corporal chastisement for the men who did not guard against comparisons. "Who moves his hand when he is reading 'I have created with My hand,'

this man deserves," said Malik, "that his hand should be hacked off." But the teachings of the mildest and most philosophical of all these sects, the Hanifites, was such that it produced unbridgeable abysses. Think of what would happen when Abu Hanifa, arguing that one should give a general not a detailed obedience, asserted that a man is truly a believer if he says, "I know very well that God has forbidden the enjoyment of the pig, but I do not know if this forbidden pig is haply that sheep or another animal."

So while the land was being violated by her neighbours the Syrians, religious Syrians were at each other's throats. Abu'l-Ala did not pretend to be religious, but it would have been as well if they had marked his words :

Devotion's dwelling has no fear of night,
And pious words are little lamps of light.

One had supposed that, when the Seljuk hordes came sweeping through the country, they would not stop to take the side of one of these religious parties. Summoned to protect the frontier, they were given land, but turned the ploughshares into swords ; splendidly successful in the field, subduing Persia, crushing those who crushed the Baghdad caliphs, Togrul Beg, their lord, became about this time—1053—a follower of Islam. Not merely that, for he became a Hani-

fite, a thorough Hanifite, and as such he ordered that a curse should be pronounced from the pulpit on the sect of al-Ashari, his accusation being that they taught that God is not on earth. An assembly of these people begged the sultan to revoke the curse. It was an age in which the weapons of religion could inflict prodigious blows. How different in mediæval France when Bishop Guy of Auxerre told the king that Christianity was on the wane ; and, having crossed himself, the king asked why. "Because both day and night," the bishop said, "our people which are excommunicated die, nor do they have themselves absolved, nor give they satisfaction to the Church. I would that all those who, for one year and a day, have suffered excommunication should be forced, by seizure of their goods, to have themselves absolved. . . ." The people prayed to Togrul Beg that he would absolve them from the curse, and pitiable was their grief when he refused.

V

ISLAM, IN A SULLEN MOOD, SCOWLS AT THE POETS

“ O GOD, I thank Thee ! ” cried Malik Shah, as he rode his horse into the Mediterranean, “ I thank Thee for the vastness of my domain.” Alp Arslan had succeeded Togrul Beg, his uncle, and when Alp Arslan fell in the year 1072 Malik Shah succeeded him. They were victorious, these Seljuks : Togrul Beg marched into Baghdad, propped up the caliph and was recognised by him as having sovereign rank ; Alp Arslan did not enter Baghdad, since he was compelled to battle with Romanus Diogenes, the nervous general of Byzantium who had married the emperor’s widow. Near the lake of Van at Manzikert, Alp Arslan, with his mobile swarms, inflicted on the enemy a terrible defeat. The courage of the Byzantines and their superior discipline were brought to nothing by deficiencies of generalship. Yet for Romanus there is much to say : he was the victim of treachery, and his

lack of caution, his nervousness, was largely due to the desire to justify his elevation. With another foeman of Alp Arslan, Kutulmish, his uncle, it was different. This person is reputed to have died of fright, which circumstance, says the historian, was the cause of much vexation to Alp Arslan. When the Seljuks flooded Asia Minor darkness fell upon the land. "I thank Thee for the vastness of my domain!" And verily he treated it as if it were his own, with power of life and death. When it pleased him he was gracious: for example, he would give a dinar to a poor man for each head of game he killed; but killing was the instinct of his people. Where the Arabs had been bent on conquest and incorporation, these were bent upon destruction. "O God, I thank Thee!" And if any one preferred to thank his God in other ways, so much the worse for him. "Religion, learning and piety flourished," says a history of the Seljuks written about the year 1197, "whereas irreligion, heresy, schism and philosophy disappeared. All paths were closed save the path of Mahomet, and no heretics were suffered in the public service." Piety and slaughter, they were old companions. The grandson of Sennacherib was very pious: "As for me, I have cast into ditches those who were against the god Achour, my lord. I have cut off their limbs, delivered them as food for dogs, for savage

beasts, for birds of prey. And in accomplishing these things I have rejoiced the heart of the great gods, my lords." Piety, pietism clutched the Moslem world and helped to bring to pass a state of things inimical to poetry. Some centuries before, when poetry was smothered by the Prophet, pietism had been a most formidable weapon, and the people had resented it. To put aside their gods, of whom they were a little wearied, and to worship Allah did not seem untimely; battles, wine and games and love made more appeal to them.¹ A northerner would boast about his courage and the courage of his comrades, thinking not that his success was forwarded by higher powers, and if the southern Arab was addicted to religion it was chiefly to demand the gods that they would favour him with many slayings, adequate protection in his raids, and plenitude of booty. So they were not much disturbed by the destruction of their gods, but the pietistic feeling—that they were to live in Allah's shadow, with prayer, fasting, continence, sacrifice of goods and money—this it was which they disliked and vainly strove against. However, pietism was no new invention, for the royal father of Imr el Kais had expostulated, not alone because the hearts of the court ladies were distracted by his son's poetry, but on the ground that

¹ Cf. Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*.

poetry is lying, and the greatest poet is the greatest liar. Anyhow Mahomet had his way, and pietism was the principal ingredient of the poison which was hurled into the wells of poetry. And now the Seljuks brought these two conflicting ones again together—though you must acknowledge that they do not always fight, as witness Faris Ibnol Harun, who produced a number of meritorious eclogues, and invariably wept at the mention of the name of God—but now the world was older by four centuries, and was provided with more lethal weapons. Poetry was overwhelmed again, and we will try to analyse the poison.

So far as one may disentangle now the varied causes it would seem as if a certain number were evolved at home and others were the fruit of foreign intercourse. Among the first category would fall the famine, droughts and civil conflict, which produced a slackening of the moral laws.¹ And as the country grew more desolate the people grew more fond of luxury—we read of Meccan

¹ Says a philosophic Spaniard, Joaquin de Santiago Concha, in his *Observaciones sobre las Guerras*: “For some the moral laws are very well in times of peace, but are inopportune in time of war. There is nothing more curious than the memoirs which certain warriors have written. To judge from them the world is a dreadful chaos, and the more splendid is an action of arms as it is more bloody, the greater is the warrior the more he plays with the moral law. It is as if, when one is dealing with nations, a crime ceases to be a crime, and morality loses its character.”

poets and their camels with the henna-coloured tails. The Meccan pilgrim stood with heavy stones about his neck if he could not pay the taxes, which began to be exorbitant. A weight of taxes on the poor, and in the life of wealthy folk a dazzling luxury. Yet the authorities endeavoured to restrain this evil. Baghdad's principal policeman was to keep an eye upon apparel and appearance, and especially to punish those who, wishing to secure the favourable smile of ladies, dyed their grey beards black, which was permitted only to the soldiers ; but you were at liberty to dye your beard bright red with henna. Music, also, was regarded as a luxury, not so much because it was practised by the dissolute as because, in the opinion of the pietists, a person hearing it would be in danger of enjoying the moment and having no thought of the future, of the horrors of the dark beyond.

And with more luxurious pretensions people looked askance upon the army. That profession had been thought the noblest, as it was the most remunerative. Rich men served from pride of race, we learn from the sagacious Leo, and the poor from hope of plunder ; but now the pay was not considered satisfactory. "We give war service on account of gain," said a south Arabian tribe to caliph Marwan. "If you secure to us the same privileges as your predecessor we will adhere to you ; if not, we will have nothing

more to do with you." The growth of this unwarlike spirit may be measured by the rising scale of penalties for those who would not serve : Omar had the culprit put into the pillory and his turban forcibly removed ; Mos'ab went further, and gave orders that the hair and beard should be cut off, while Abdalmalik's representative in Persia cut off the delinquent's head. There is preserved a mournful chant by some one who was under orders to proceed from Kufa to a distant province. He is full of pity for himself at leaving his beloved,¹ and at going to a place where opportunities for monetary gain, by plunder or by trade, are small ; where one has to fight with hunger, and where the dreadful heat obliges beards to grow with such rapidity that one must shear them off or plait them ; and the people who have been there tell us that one must expect to be transfixed with arrows or laid low with knives, and they say that we shall not return for years, not until our sons are grey, and all our friends have long been dead. . . . The military question was of paramount importance—here we touch upon the causes of decay wherein the foreign nations had a share. In the youth of Islam, when religious ardour

¹ "Every woman shall be looked upon as an adulteress who has stayed with a man for so long as it takes to boil an egg." This was laid down by Manu, the old Indian law-giver, who lived more than two thousand years before Mahomet.

filled the ranks, a deal of care was taken to maintain the army at a fighting pitch. The soldier who was planted in the conquered lands was given by the State a yearly income, probably his food, and he was not allowed on any pretext to engage in agriculture. The remuneration was so calculated that it would support him, taking into account the local prices and the size of his family. Thus arose a class of warriors who loved their trade and lived for it, and the unfortunate result of that is seen among the ants : their soldiery disdain the work of peace and have become so much the slaves of war that with their mandibles they can do nothing else but fight or skirmish ; if the auxiliaries do not feed them they will starve in reach of food. You may reply, with Hobbes, that the state of war is the natural state of man—yes, but the garden that we choose to cultivate is hardly natural. We spend a lot of time in growing virtues which the roughness of the soil does not encourage, and our natural state, we have agreed, is not a state of grace. Afterwards the military colonies upon the frontier came to be entrusted to the Turks and other aliens. But the disastrous policy could go no further when the troops, instead of being paid, were given land—that is to say, the income of estates was given to the officers for distribution. And then we have the blending of the Arabs with

the subject races, which the caliph Omar vainly tried to stop. "The world has intermingled," said Abu'l-Ala, "the people of the plain with the daughters of the mountain; the mother of the race of Nomair is a Turk; she of Okail is a slave from Samarkand."

Finally, the clock of Arab culture was set back by foreigners, crusaders. These, on first arriving in Arabia, caused the one surviving link of native union to be strengthened—Islam called her wayward children to resist the common foe. Of course they were not very learned people, these crusaders: their dim knowledge of geography, for instance, was responsible for many a disaster which befell them. But they were from learned lands, at all events from countries whence had come the diabolic science of the *filsouf*—philosophy—the foe of Islam. And the natives settled to resist with all their might the teachings of the infidel. There is a case in Yakut's life of Ahmad ibn Thuwabah, the secretary: being advised to learn Euclid, there is brought to him a teacher who draws a straight line and explains that it has length without breadth. The secretary, certain that some slight is meant on God's Straight Path, bids the teacher to be gone with contumely. Of course they were not very chivalrous people, these crusaders: apart from the exalted devotees, some were knights of industry, and a considerable number

were disastrous criminals, on whom the clergy had imposed this expedition as a penance, being full of dangers and of hardship. Such was the conduct of these men that Moslems got of Christianity a most unfortunate impression, and it is no wonder that they haughtily withdrew themselves into the bleakness of their own religion. It is to be deplored that, unlike Leo the Byzantine, they did not devote more pains to studying the foe ; they would have then expected what is usual from devotees and criminals. How one must regret that they did not hear of Jehan Bodel, that they did not stop their ears to criticism such as subsequently came from Luther and Melanchthon. A certain Brother Richard, in the year 1300, wrote the *Confutatio Alcoran* ; it is noticeable that his stay in ‘Babylon, that beautiful city of the Saracens,’ did not inspire him with a friendliness for Islam. Martin Luther added footnotes to this volume when it was translated, and one fears that the crusaders’ foemen often thought this was the attitude of Christianity : “Out upon you, devil !” says one of the notes ; and a second, “Here the devil smells a rat” ; and another, “Oh fie, for shame, you horrid devil, you damned Mahomet !” There is an epilogue discussing which is worse, Mahomet or the Pope, and the twenty-second chapter settles that it is the Pope. “Partly this Mahometan

pest and partly the Pope's idolatry have long been leading us straight to wrack and ruin—may God have mercy upon *some* of us ! ” so says Melanchthon. But how reconciled the Arabs would have been to face a person like the brave and simple Jehan, who was in St. Louis's first crusade, but afterwards abandoned the society of men, because he was devastated with leprosy, the sad fruit of misconduct which crusaders used to carry home. He wrote a *Jeu de Saint Nicholas*, and placed the action of it in the war. There is a Christian, a youthful knight, who speaks as follows :

Segneur, se je sui jones, ne m'aiés en despit !
on a vœu souvent grant cuer en cors petit.
je ferrai cel forcheur, je l'ai piecha eslit ;
sachiés je l'ochirai, s'il anchois ne m'ochist.¹

But Islam, recking not of this, desired to have no more to do with Christians and their works. “ Let there be an end to this learning ! ” “ Amen,” cried a vast majority of Christians. Paul had preached that faith, and faith alone, could be the saving power ; in the name of Christian

¹ Monmerqué et Michel, *Théâtre Français au Moyen-Age*. The difficulty of a few words compels me to put it into modern English :

O Lord, if I be young, let me not be disdained !
Big hearts are often seen in little breasts contained.
Long since I picked a man, my blow won't be restrained ;
Be sure that I will brain him if I be not brained.

faith a lock was put on mental progress,¹ Greek philosophy was banned, new miracles demanded, relic-worship spread. Really it is inexplicable why faithful Christians and faithful Moslems did not fall into each other's arms. Less for the reason, advanced by Judah ha Levi, that they both accept the roots of Israel's faith and, instead of the logical conclusions, seize on pagan rites, less for such a reason should they have been allies than because they both of them crusaded against learning. Priests were rampant : those of Christendom were not alone the enemies of new opinions but of man. Emissaries were sent out from Rome at the end of the twelfth century to 'catch and kill the little foxes,' that is to say, the Waldensians ; and the gloomy Lothario, who called himself Innocent, made for a certain time all children born in England illegitimate. The priests² of Islam

¹ Cf. Lecky, *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne*.

² In Islam, which has never had a real priesthood, there are imams and ulemas, the former being those who lead the public devotion, while the latter are a class of privileged expounders of the law. When the priesthood of a country is not organised, so that the highest priest is not the king, a man who has been mutilated can ascend the throne. As an example, in the story of the Moslem state of Seistan is the blinded son of Taj al Din. Eighteen brothers had been killed, the eldest was incapable of ruling, and this one was proclaimed the satrap, though he had been made, as Persians put it, hopeless of ever beholding the world. He had been blinded not to make him legally, but physically, unfit to rule.

formed a clique which was not under State control ; they supervised both education and the law. Christian friars used to gossip and to laugh in church, especially at any blunder in the service, and the priests of Islam painted from the pulpit every detail of the resurrection, which themselves—we have it from Abu'l-Ala—did often disbelieve in. “They have neither religion,” he declares, “nor piety ; do not let yourself be blinded by the rose-chains which they have perpetually in their hands.” Now what a change was this from the exalted conduct of al-Junaid, the pearl of his age ! Being noticed out of doors with a rosary, some person asked him how it came that he who was ascended to the heights of holiness should carry such a thing. “I do not quit the way,” said he, “which led me to my Lord.” It is not necessary to bring forward instances of Christian relic-worship ;

And in Persia, where the king is tyrant, it is not the canon law but custom which prevents a mutilated man succeeding. So when Hormizd of Persia was reported to Shapur, his father, on the ground of domineering and rebellious conduct it appeared to him that he could prove his loyalty by cutting off his hand, and thus disqualify himself from the succession. But when Shapur heard of this he nearly died of grief ; he wrote to Hormizd that, if he destroyed himself limb by limb, yet no one else should have the lordship. Ultimately Hormizd was crowned ; Shapur, then, in this case made an exception. However, when the king is also priest, as with the Jews or in England, no man may fulfil the royal functions who is blind or lame, or if his nose be flat, or if he be broken-handed, or even if he have anything superfluous.

this prevailed in Islam also—Abu'l-Abbas got a fortune from his father on condition that he set about to purchase all the Prophet's hairs that he could find ; thus he was to demonstrate that he repented of his former life, and he commanded that, on his demise, the whole collection should be placed between his lips. In Christendom and Islam dwelt the blindest faith, and it was naturally scornful of mere human toil. If you credit priests who say that mountains can be thrown into the sea by faith, it would be foolish if you were to patronise laborious engineers. There was no priestly caste, no sacred book among the Greeks. Their theologians were the poets. "Our religion," says Herodotus, "has been established by Homer and Hesiod." And there was no restraint upon the liberty of thought. "What is the use of learning," said the Moslem priests, "when Allah is omniscient, and he can deal with your presumption as with that of al-Khalib ?" Here, it must be said, that a quotation out of Sadi is the most effective argument in modern Persia, and the Arabs have extraordinary kindness for the oldest of their tales and fables. This al-Khalib dwelt at Bassora in the eighth century. He had determined to invent a mode of calculation that should be quite simple, and permit a servant-girl to do her business at a shop without the risk of being swindled. As the philanthropist,

his mind upon the scheme, was entering a mosque he struck against a pillar, he was thrown upon the floor by the violence of the shock, and the result was death. . . . A more enlightened age had, as we saw, decided that the Koran was a thing which had been made, but now they settled that it was eternal, uncreated, a miracle of style, the language of Paradise. A man who thought the contrary could have recourse to science or to mysticism. Avicenna was a doctor, and as such the bigots did not interfere with him for making songs which recommended wine ; they did not know that he was also singing as a rebel. When he observed that people should be moderate in taking wine it was as doctor that he spoke, but when he suggested larger quantities he spoke as one rebellious against the bigots. Wine had also got a meaning for the mystics, the Sufi. It was possible to look upon them with aversion. "They revolve in mystic dances," says Abu'l-Ala, "as if they were laden with sweet wine. No, 'tis not the fear of God which moves them ; only that which is forbidden do they crave." We shall do better to believe the words of Renan. It is difficult to take a philosophic view of conduct which annoys you, as they seem to have annoyed the hermit of Ma'arrah. The Sufi movement is, to Renan, an uprising of the Aryan spirit in revolt against the terrible simplicity of the Semitic.

But we are concerned with the rebellion, always growing fainter, of the poets and of all who strove for intellectual freedom. There is a good example in the man who was requested by his father to desert the fields of poetry. There have been other fathers who have done the same, but Mutamid the Andalucian was himself a poet. And he had not been without success :

You come not, all the days are black ;
But if you stay the nights are fair.

He wrote this to the conqueror of Spain, Jusuf ben Tashfin. "I suppose," said the recipient, "that he means I am to send two female slaves to him, a black one and a white one." "Surely not!" cried the reader, "what he means is that, without your presence, all his days, O prince of the believers, are in blackness, and if you be present then the night is clear as day." "By God!" said Jusuf, "that is true and beautiful. Now write an answer that I weep for him, and that his absence is the cause of aching in my head. Would to God that Abbas Ibnol Ahnef were alive, to see how much he is outstripped in tenderness." Mutamid thought his son was far too much addicted to the pen; he waxed satirical and wrote :

When you have a man to kill
Never, never spare the quill.

With your faithful pocket-knife
 You will end the braggart's life.
 Nothing, as compared with you,
 Can old Aristotle do.

And Radhi took his father's measure, and replied :

Henceforward, sire, I will not look
 For wisdom out of any book.
 How foolish I to trust the quill
 Or ink in place of blood to spill,
 Seeing that, in life, reward
 Is only granted to the sword—

which, as the father was a fine poet and a luckless warrior, had much of the satirical. Radhi bit the dust of Ronda, where he was his father's representative ; Mutamid, at the fall of Seville, was transported to Morocco. His complaints and threnodies are of the loveliest in Arab literature.

The shadows have assembled. By the Tigris and the Nile and the golden Guadalquivir we have watched the wonderful procession. We have tarried by the waters that were dancing to embrace the feet of dawn, and we have looked upon the jewels scattered by the setting sun. Now falls the night, and, having watched beside the rivers, it remains for us to see if they united any cities of importance.

• • • • •

Would the boat of human knowledge have

been stranded if there had not been for it the hospitality of Arab waters? . . . Yes, one has to thank the Arabs who received this glorious cargo and upheld it for five hundred years. The writings of the Greeks they collected and translated. They developed agriculture and astronomy. The Moslem empire, when Mahomet had been dead for ninety years, extended from the Himalayas to the Pyrenees. And they determined, being proud, imaginative and ambitious, that their conquest should be of the spirit also. Such a high resolve was bound to stoop before it could be married to the feebleness of human action; and the Arabs failed from time to time—for instance, Plato was for them too much of an idealist. But Aristotle was their god, and in the ninth century they translated all surviving Grecian works on medicine and mathematics. They created the sciences of algebra and chemistry; colleges they built, and libraries. . . . It is written in Professor Mackail's illuminating and exquisite introduction that the authors of the Greek Anthology were as a golden bridge from classic ages to the rise of mediæval Europe. But the bridge appears to be a trifle insecure, considering that the last of the great poets of Greece was Meleager, by birth a Syrian, who flourished in the year 100 B.C. From then the bridge is made of Byzantines, who gave themselves a good amount of trouble, but were

definitely stopped when Justinian closed the school of Athens and Damascius, another Syrian, betook himself to Asia. This was about the time when the poetic genius of the Arabs darted into life; it was the Age of Ignorance. Until the rise of mediæval Europe it was the Arabs who protected learning, and I think that they can claim a portion of the bridge. With regard to general literature the service of the Arab was unbroken; with regard to verse, although the Poets of the Ignorance were no continuation of the Greeks, I would submit that Grecian thought was carried on by their successors of the tenth century, as in these poets was the Greek philosophy.

While in the rest of Europe only certain of the priests were literate, the schools of Cordova, of Seville, Granada, Toledo were so numerous that nearly all the Arabs there could read and write. Books were collected with the greatest zeal. Poets were rewarded, every farmer wrote impromptus, and the Christians, to the grief of Bishop Alvaro of Cordova, would have no more to do with Latin commentaries, but applied themselves exclusively to Arabic. So, too, the pious Christians resented it that all the life of Frederick II. of Sicily was coloured by the Arabs; in fact, he would not go crusading to Jerusalem without his Arab teacher of philosophy. But if we confine ourselves to Spain

we shall perceive how universal was the art of poetry when such a monster as el-Motadhid of Seville could forgive his son's excessive kindness to the foe because a letter from that son was couched in poetry. This is even more remarkable than that el-Motadhid was able to compose the following poem :

I have laid upon you, Ronda,
My dear necklace. And, you know,
The circles made of sword and helmet
Have in me their life and glow.
If this life of mine is long,
I'll shorten lives among the foe ;
And will attempt to live as they,
That my desire for blood may grow.
How many warriors have I slain,
How many hundreds at a blow ?
Their heads are now my garden's necklace,
Where I set them in a row.

Let us not forget that in this period was flourishing the poet Ibn Derradsh, who composed these lovely lines :

Hail, jasmine flower, on thy liquid stem,
Among the mountain peaks, delighting them,
Pure as the mountains that arrayed
Are in green sandals and green, silky shade.
What seest thou, what passing flight
Of dream is in thy sight ?
We can but see that emerald eye
And how the pearls around it lie.

And these :

The blissful hands of spring remain
Imprisoned by their lily chain,
Young silver leaves the fortress hold
And flowers wave a sword of gold.

While of Tathili one may quote :

Far from the native coast was I confined—
Alas ! the storms of weeping left me blind.
This darkened eye could never grow to see
Before it drank the dews of poetry.

And while it would be marvellous in very cultured, non-Islamic lands, the fact that all three wives of Mutamid were poets is a striking proof of Andalucian culture. It is worth while to mention how he met his earliest wife. One evening, near Seville, he and his favourite, Ibn Ammar, the great poet, were in a wayside house, and they were looking at the storm-tossed waters of a lake. Then Ibn Ammar spoke :

The waters are a coat of mail, fashioned by the breeze.

In the room were several women. One of them heard what the poet said, and thus she spoke :

How terrible this coat of mail when the waters freeze !

Mutamid, in surprise, turned to the woman and saw that she was beautiful. Eventually he

married her. The Princess Welladet is another famous poet who, on the death, in the year 1121, of her father Mahomet III., threw aside the restraints of the harem. She loved the society of poets and heaped her favours upon them, and especially on Ibn Seidun, the learned vizier, to whom she wrote :

I shall go forth to you, when earth's old lover, Night,
 Is unto those who love with mysteries alight.
 What profit have I drawn when the moon's torch has failed ?
 Where have the Pleiads led me ! What has the dark availed?

After Welladet the most remarkable among these women-poets was Hafsa er-Rekunijet. She was celebrated for her beauty, her wealth, her nobility, her poetic talent and her love for the vizier Abu Dshafer. So she merits more attention than has hitherto been given her. A poem on this lady is extant, wherein the writer—who is Abu'l-Hasan, the historian—says that the garden was delighted at her presence, that the coloured lines of flowers came towards her. She spent a night with Abu Dshafer in the pleasure-garden of Mumil at Granada, and when he requested a description of it she produced these lines :

God gave the night ; shall we not evermore
 Dream of our night within old Mumil's door ?
 The cypress bow themselves before the breath
 Of Nejed's wind—Hear what the perfume saith !—

Grey turtledoves cease not their singing, and
Along the water-course geraniums stand.

Several days after this one Abu Merwan sent her a description of the scene, and she replied :

For us the garden was no pleasure-place,
But where unfettered evils ran a race.
Cool waters ran, but no salute were bringing
For us, and for themselves the turtledoves were singing.
Whom shall it profit if we entertain
Delusions that from time to time are slain ?
Adorned with stars eternal hung the sky,
To be the black-board of astronomy.

She abandoned Abu Dshafer for the sake of the governor of Granada, and when her old lover was executed for a political reason she persuaded herself that she was to blame ; she clothed herself in mourning.

And Ommol-Kerem, an Almerian princess who was in love with Semar the Fair, has justified herself in verse :

Is it so wonderful if I should care
To sink me down to him ? Why do you stare ?
Does not the laden moon go down the sky
So that poor darkness may be lit thereby ?

And in Almeria we find the aged poet, Ibrahim ibn Chafadshe. He preferred to live among the mountains, where, he said, the echo's answer

was "O Ibrahim!" when he had called "O Ali!" From his poems we may quote these fragments :

I am in sorrow, dreaming of a distant place,
 And thither I would go throughout the day.
 But when the night encircles me
 Behold I give a message to the North wind and the South
 Wind,
 Saying to the North Wind : Bear my love,
 And to the South : O friend, bear thou my questionings.

The world is but an empty leaf
 Whereon the night has written.
 Ah, the night who beckons me,
 And with her stars I travelled,
 Yes, until I stood beside the pole.
 What is the end of life, I say ?
 We struggle, and we come into the ditch.
 And there above the ditch is laughter,
 And the leaves, in laughter, fall on the forgotten road.
 From side to side I swing my soul,
 For I have put away desire.

So much for the state of Arab culture. With regard to the translations from Arabic to Latin, a school was founded in the year 1130 by the Archbishop Raymond, of Toledo. Gundisalvi, the local archdeacon, was its head ; but, as he began by being ignorant of Arabic, a certain John ben David put the works from Arabic into Castilian and Gundisalvi, from Castilian, put them into Latin. The Jews were largely busied

as translators and as teachers of this Grecian-Arabic philosophy. There was Avicenna, for instance, who brought Neo-Platonism into Europe. Of him it has been said, as of Spinoza, that he kept his philosophic speculations free from theological admixture. So the Semites held aloft the torch. There was a splendid freedom, and of this Averroes availed himself. When afterwards he was condemned in the year 1269 by the Bishop of Paris, he was falsely credited with many statements, such as that the world has been for ever in existence, and that the Christian religion is impossible, the Jewish meant for children, the Mahometan for pigs. Now trouble overtook the Semites. Having played their part, they were invited to be gone. The Jews went in the year 1492, at the command of Ferdinand, the grandson of a Jewess. Every land was not prepared to take them, as disease had broken out upon the ships. But the Turkish Sultan, Selim, was unlike his brother kings ; he wrote to Ferdinand in gratitude for having sent him those whom he considered as among the best of all his subjects. And the Moriscoes were expelled from Spain for not amalgamating with the Spaniard. It is more probable that the majority had grown by this time ignorant of Arabic ; the proof is in a poem by Mahomet Rabadan, of which the MS. is at the British Museum. Its language is the most delightful

Spanish ; it was written in the year 1603 for the instruction of the Moriscoes of Tunis, who had no other language.

One evening, in Sofia, we found with what persistency the people driven to the Sultan's old domain have kept their Spanish. Dr. Dillon and myself were strolling in the Jewish quarter, and, luckily for us, the houses were so small that the colossal women made their supper preparations in the street, while contemplative patriarchs were sitting at the door, and younger folk were, for the most part, being picturesque. A lonely girl was not averse from conversation, so we spoke to her in Spanish.

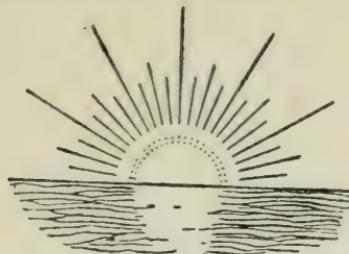
"No doubt," she was saying, "there will be many towns less good than Sofia, but I have not seen them." "You are fortunate." "*Por Dios*, one is very well—you see my uncle there? He reads whatever happens. Just now he told me what had been at Rustchuk. You understand, *señores*, that we have three newspapers in Sofia, and *El Amigo del Pueblo*, which is another, and is made in Rustchuk, and then in Sofia, and then in Rustchuk." "Perhaps the Bulgars say you have too much. That has been said about your people in other countries." "Our people have the fire-brigade. I think the town was being burnt one day about twenty-five or twenty years ago by the soldiers of the Sultan. And our people saved it; so the Prince

Alexander said that we should always work the fire-brigade." "He was heroic, too." "That is the truth. Sometimes you will see the lady weeping at his coffin over there, you know, at the other side of the town." "But the Bulgars, do they treat you better than they treated him ?" She shrugged her shoulders. "They might be jealous that you have another language for yourselves." "Of course we talk Bulgarian, and then our own language." "It is the Spanish of the Middle Ages. Ah ! that is a speech of heroes." "Caramba ! it is not Spanish !" "But the language we are speaking now ? Surely it is Spanish ?" "Surely not, *señores*. It is our own language."

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